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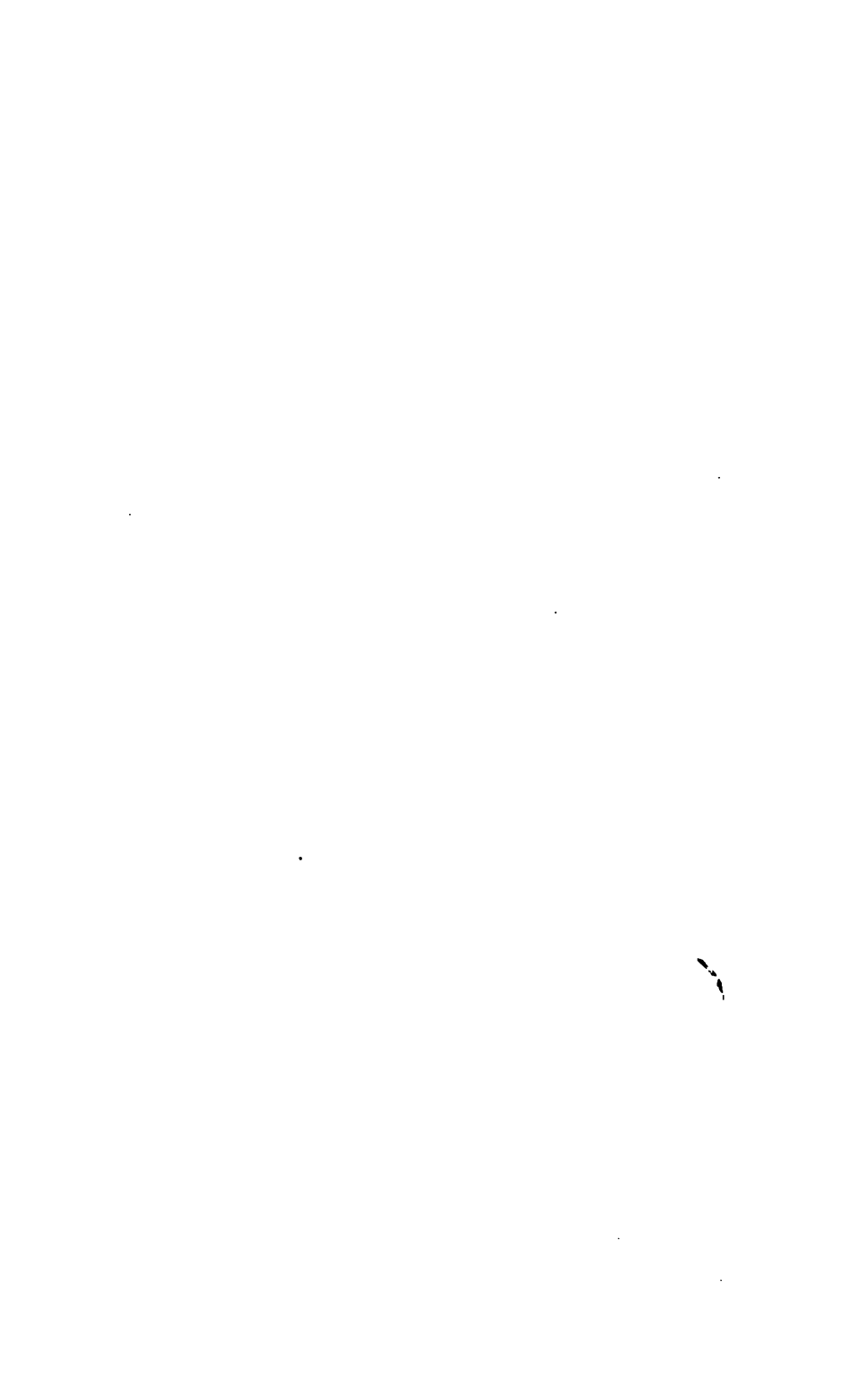
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HOSTAGES TO FORTUNE

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF
'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET'
ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES
VOL. I.



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TO
THOSE KIND FRIENDS IN RADNORSHIRE
AMONGST WHOM
THE AUTHOR SPENT A HAPPY SUMMER HOLIDAY,
This Book
IS DEDICATED.



HOSTAGES TO FORTUNE



CHAPTER I.

‘Full many a lady
I have eyed with best regard ; and many a time
The harmony of their tongues hath into bondage
Brought my too diligent ear : for several virtues
Have I liked several women ; never any
With so full soul, but some defect in her
Did quarrel with the noblest grace she owed,
And put it to the foil. But you, O you,
So perfect and so peerless, are created
Of every creature’s best.’

PROFOUND excitement prevails in Llandrysak this sunny August morning. Dog-carts dash wildly down the fragment of inchoate street, whose chief feature is the post-office ; phaetons and pony-carriages unknown to Llandrysak wind gaily across the common, and appear on the railway-bridge. The station disgorges a crowd of smartly-dressed young women and

their attendant swains, who swarm over the little settlement, and forthwith make for the one establishment which provides refreshment of a light and un-intoxicating character; for the people who come to Llandrysak are, as a rule, temperate in the extreme, and hardly know the meaning of a public-house.

Mr. Cates—the purveyor of things in general, from butcher's meat and bacon to tea, sugar, confectionery, and fancy biscuits; from bread, butter, and eggs to greenstuff and fish—has been labouring all night in the sweat of his brow to prepare adequately for this peaceful invasion. Monster hams await the sacrificial knife; quartern loaves wall-in one side of the well-used counter; all the interior accommodation available in Mr. Cates's private abode has been thrown open for the reception of visitors; and tea and coffee are in perpetual preparation. But the most Mr. Cates can do in this way falls short of his patrons' demands. They storm his passage, they swarm upon his stairs, and throng his rooms, even trying to invade the sanctity of his bedchamber, and wax loud and savage in their demands for accommodation and refreshment, until Mr. Cates—although

feeling that he is making money as fast as he can drop it into his till—wishes that his customers were less numerous or less importunate ; or, in his own words, wishes that he ‘ had known beforehand that there would be so many ;’ though what he would have done had he been so informed, seeing that his house has no power of expansion, and that he has no yard or garden available for the erection of a tent, must ever remain a mystery. Whatever power of expansion his business premises possess has been exercised to the uttermost ; for he has absorbed as much of the roadway as he can venture to encumber without detriment to the public. The space before his busy little shop is spread with trays of tarts and buns, hot and hot from the oven, promptly renewed as the hungry visitors consume them.

And wherefore this inroad of the surrounding neighbourhood into quiet little Llandrysak, famous only for its saline and sulphur springs, and in its normal condition the tranquil resort of health-seekers and water-drinkers ? Question easily answered. For the last fortnight placards have adorned the public places of Llandrysak—the gates of the market-hall,

the portal of the post-office, and the railway-station—setting forth that on this third of August an Eisteddfod would be holden at Llandrysak, and numerous prizes—ranging from ten pounds to five shillings—would be awarded to successful competitors in the art of music and dramatic recitation. A monster tent has been brought from a distant city—Llandrysak is a good forty miles from any large town—and erected behind the pretty little modern Gothic church on the common yonder; and after braving the breeze for a day or two has ignominiously collapsed on Sunday afternoon, to be reërected with increased stability on Monday. To-day is Tuesday, and the tent still stands bravely. The warm summer sky and soft west wind promise a glorious noontide, and at half-past nine o'clock the inhabitants of surrounding villages are pouring into Llandrysak as fast as the single line of rail can bring them.

Perhaps of all the quiet out-of-the-way places in this sea-bound isle, there is none more tranquil, more utterly remote from the busy world, than Llandrysak. It is certainly not a town, it is hardly to be called a village. Two large and prosperous hotels,

and three or four smaller hostelryes — which are rather public boarding-houses than inns — have sprung up around the mineral springs. Three or four shops and about half a dozen lodging-houses have been built on the edge of an undulating stretch of heathy common ; and the new church, erected by public subscription, looks down upon the little settlement from its elevation on the aforesaid common.

Llandrysak is situated on a plateau seven hundred feet above the sea-level, and all around it rise the green Cambrian hills, not mighty peaks, like Snowdon or Penmaenmawr, but lovable hills, grassy and ferny—hills that tempt the pedestrian, and seem to cry aloud, even to the idlest loungeur : ‘Come, climb our gentle breasts, and breathe the purer ether that circles round our heads.’

Quiet and remote though Llandrysak is, it is eminently popular in its way. The hotels and lodging-houses are full to plethora in the season, and guests are billeted at outlying farmhouses, to an alarming extent, considering the number of the lodgers in relation to the space available for their accommodation. In sheltered nooks upon the hill-

side, in rustic lanes, you come upon lowly homesteads, which to the stranger's eye appear in no wise too spacious for a farmer's household, and which yet afford board and lodgment to fifteen or twenty water-drinkers in time of need.

Of the two hotels, the Cambria is select and aristocratic, judiciously dividing its guests into two sections, known as Lords and Commons; and the Spring House popular and easy-going. Wondrous stories are told of the chaff and practical joking which obtains at the latter hostelry, and the matrimonial engagements apt to result from a week's residence therein. Pianos are heard long after midnight; amateur concerts and Christy minstrelsy diversify the monotony of social intercourse. Picnics and excursions of all kinds are of daily occurrence; and the click of croquet-balls without and billiard-balls within may be heard from morn till midnight. The more quiet Cambria has its croquet-lawn also, sheltered by surrounding groves of spice-breathing pine, and its spacious billiard-room over the stony chamber where the unsavoury waters are dealt out by complacent maidens, across a pewter-

covered bar, suggestive of Spiers and Pond—awful chamber, pervaded ever by the odour of innumerable rotten eggs, which odour is the delightful characteristic of a sulphur-spring in perfection.

This pump-room stands flush with the more aristocratic wing of the Cambria, and its doors and windows open upon the croquet-lawn and piny groves, and a broad space of gravel before the house. An avenue leads from the hotel down to a little bit of road that crosses the common and joins the high-road—for the Cambria stands in a genteel seclusion, about half a mile from the settlement that has grown up in the neighbourhood of the railway-station.

From the pump-room, on this sunny August morning, emerges a gentleman, who wipes his lips with a cambric handkerchief, and wears a disgusted expression of countenance.

‘Upon my word, Dewrance, I can’t stand much more of it,’ he exclaims. ‘Faugh! assafœtida would be ambrosial in comparison.’

Mr. Dewrance, in clerical costume—faultless black and Roman collar—is lounging on a bench outside, smoking an after-breakfast cigar, with contentment

depicted upon his visage. He is a wandering light in the ecclesiastic system, and has come to do duty at the unendowed church on the common for the season. He is not at Llandrysak for the waters.

‘What does it matter how nasty the stuff is if you think it’s doing you good?’ he asks languidly.

The morning is too warm for much exertion. Even the clerical mind needs repose after the labour of performing matins for the edification of about a dozen females, chiefly of the spinster persuasion.

‘Ah, it’s all very well for you to talk like that,’ remonstrates the other. ‘In the first place you don’t drink that nauseous stuff; and in the second, it would jump with your notions of self-mortification—fasting, abstinence, and all that kind of thing—to imbibe obnoxious waters. The sort of thing St. Francis d’Assisi would have liked, you know.’

‘Are you going to the Eisteddfod?’ asks Mr. Dewrance, calmly ignoring these remarks.

‘Are you?’

‘That depends. Slingford Edwards is to be there in full force,’ with a wry face; ‘and I don’t much

care about the business. But I promised some ladies—'

'Of course; I never knew such a man! Your whole life is frittered away in such small engagements; not an hour that is not pledged to a petticoat. Dewrance, in spite of your varied experience of life, your travels, your knowledge of the world, you are still what you were born to be.'

'What is that?' inquires Mr. Dewrance, with the faintest show of curiosity.

'A tame cat.'

'Why not?' asks the Curate placidly. 'Tame-catism isn't half a bad thing in its way. I like women, and women like me. I can make friends of them. I don't flirt, and I never commit myself; and then I look to women to help me in the serious business of my life. A priest can achieve great victories with an army of women at his command. How are our churches beautified, our sick tended, our poor fed, our children taught and cared for and civilised? Do you think the masculine element goes for much in these things? No, Westray; women are the Church's strong rock. As they were the last at the

foot of the cross, so they have become the first at the altar.'

'Upon my soul,' ejaculates Westray, pulling his dark-brown moustache, 'I begin to think that women exercise a great deal more influence than we give them credit for; more than half the world is under petticoat government.'

'Why don't you join the majority?' asks Dewrance, with a keen look at his friend.

They have known each other less than a fortnight, yet are on those friendly and familiar terms which men slip into so easily. Herman Westray is a man who has made himself a name in the world of letters. He began his career as a journalist in the year he left Oxford, and has only lately shaken himself free from the trammels of the daily press. He has won reputation as poet, dramatist, critic, novelist, and is a power in literary circles. Stimulated by success, and proud of his budding laurels, he has worked his brain to the verge of exhaustion, and has come to Llandrysak Wells at the advice of a wise old doctor, who attended him nine-and-twenty years ago for chicken-pox and croup.

‘Why don’t you look out for some nice girl who would reconcile you to the idea of matrimony?’ pursues Dewrance. ‘You’re just the kind of man who is bound to go to eternal smash if he doesn’t marry.’

If Mr. Dewrance’s vocabulary is more modern than ecclesiastical, it must be urged in his excuse that he has not been long in holy orders, and that his previous experiences have been of the world worldly.

‘I never found a nice girl yet,’ replies Westray. ‘I have met handsome girls, clever girls, fascinating girls, but never the woman to whom I could say, “Take my life into your keeping, and be my better angel. Come between me and my evil thoughts; lead me into the path of peace.”’

‘Girls nowadays are awfully fast, I admit,’ says Dewrance gravely, ‘unless they are Anglican. Try an Anglican girl.’

‘No, thanks. A young woman who would get up at five o’clock in the morning to embroider an antependium, and neglect the housekeeping. I shouldn’t like a free-thinking girl, you understand,

but I should prefer her religion to take its colour from such teachers as Richter and Carlyle.'

Dewrance shrugs his shoulders with a deprecating air, and rises from his recumbent position.

'I think we'd better go and have a look at the Eisteddfod,' he says, 'in spite of Slingford Edwards.'

Slingford Edwards is the Nonconformist light of Llandrysak—Wesleyan or Baptist, no one seemed very clear which ; but eminently popular among the natives. He holds forth thrice every Sunday from his rostrum in the red-brick chapel, and appears on weekdays with his manly form equipped in a costume at once agricultural and sportsmanlike, his well-shaped legs, of which he is justly proud, encased in worsted hose, his feet in smart buckled shoes.

This gentleman's popularity at Llandrysak gives him importance at the national festival. He is deputy-chairman, and does most of the hard work, Mr. Morton Jones, the squire, being only required to make a condescending speech, and sit in his arm-chair, smiling blandly across a little table, throughout the proceedings.

'Let us go and see how Slingford Edwards does


it,' says Mr. Dewrance, throwing away the stump of his cigar.

They stroll down the avenue and across the common, where even on this warm August day the west wind blows pure and fresh. Green hills ring them round like a girdle, and beyond the green rise loftier peaks, russet-brown or deep purple-tinged gray, melting into the blue cloudless sky.

'I believe your sulphur and saline springs are a gigantic humbug,' cries Herman Westray, looking round him with the artist's love of the beautiful. 'But those hills and this pure air might reanimate exhausted mankind on the brink of the grave. I'm very glad my good old doctor sent me here.'

'You look twice as good a man as you did when you came,' answers Dewrance. 'I never saw such an exhausted specimen of humanity. You looked like a consumptive vampire.'

'I had been working six hours a day, or six hours a night, at literature for the last three years. That sort of thing does tell upon a man, especially when he tries to combine social enjoyment with intellectual



labour—dines out three or four times a week, wastes his afternoons at garden parties, goes to the opera whenever the heavy swells sing, attends all first performances at the theatres, and so on ; thus reducing his working time to the small hours between midnight and morning.'

'Dreadful !' cries Dewrance. 'I wonder you're alive.'

'O, that's habit. If I were to think of the unwholesomeness of my life, I daresay I should die. The quiet of the grave would seem preferable to such high pressure. But I take things easily.'

'You look like it,' says Dewrance, with a side-glance at his friend's hollow cheeks and darkly-circled eyes.

'Llandrysak has done me no end of good. I had acquired an uncomfortable habit of falling asleep over my desk, which hinted at apoplexy, and now I am as fresh as paint. I have written two acts of a comedy since Saturday.'

'I thought you were here for rest.'

'O, comedy dialogue hardly counts as work. Besides, I am pledged to give Mrs. Brandreth something

sparkling for the opening of the autumn season at the Frivolity.'

'The Frivolity? That's one of the new theatres, isn't it?'

'All that there is of the most new: a house like a bonbonnière by Siraudin; all quilted canary satin and gold, with a background of burgundy-coloured velvet; medallion portraits of Shakespeare's heroines on the panels—though what Shakespeare has to do with the Frivolity is more than any fellow can understand. In fact, it's a charming little box. The actors are most of them ex-cavalry subalterns; the actresses—well, there isn't a plain woman among them.'

'Mrs. Brandreth herself is a handsome woman, I've heard,' says the Curate.

'It would be a bald description of Myra Brandreth to call her handsome,' answers Herman. 'She is simply one of the most fascinating women who ever turned the brains of men. As for beauty, perhaps there are some handsomer, in her own theatre even; but there is a kind of loveliness about Mrs. Brandreth which I never saw in any one else. It isn't

a question of eyes, or nose, or complexion, or figure. She breathes an atmosphere of beauty.'

'Poetical,' says the Curate; 'one would think you were among the men whose brains she has turned.'

'Not I. My part in life is rather that of observer of other men's follies than partaker in their delusions. I contrive to dispose of my surplus idiotcy in magazine articles.'

'Isn't your Mrs. Brandreth a woman with a history?' asks Dewrance. 'I seem to remember having heard—'

"There is a history in all men's lives." Yes, they tell divers romantic legends of Mrs. Brandreth.'

'Antecedents rather discreditable than otherwise,' hazards the Curate, who from the spiritual altitude he inhabits bends his ear occasionally to murmurs from the mundane level beneath.

'Mrs. Brandreth is an English officer's daughter, and an English officer's widow. I know nothing further to her disadvantage.'

'But come, now, don't people say that Lord Earlswood built this theatre on purpose for her?'

'Theatres are generally built by some one, and for some one,' answers the imperturbable Herman.

'I haven't been inside a theatre since I took orders,' says Mr. Dewrance. 'The opera, of course, is different. I take a seat in a friend's box now and then.'

They are close to the tent by this time, and the twanging of a harp within announces that the competition is in progress. They pay for their tickets at a little wooden watch-box outside the tent, and then, instead of entering with the commonalty, go round to the back, and make their way straight to the platform, Mr. Dewrance being a privileged person, for whom a place is reserved among the magnates of the land.

These magnates consist of a few country gentlemen, with their wives and daughters, who occupy a double row of benches on the platform, and thence survey the crowded audience below. Mr. Morton Jones, the chairman; Mr. Slingford Edwards; Mr. Evan Jones, the musical adjudicator; Mr. Davis, the treasurer; Mr. Bufton, the secretary; and two or three other gentlemen officially concerned in the

day's proceedings, are clustered about a table in the centre of this platform.

The body of the tent is as full as it can be, and the audience, perspiring but happy, are listening with rapt attention to an ancient Welsh song which a young man of the carpenter profession is singing to an accompaniment on the harp. It is really a spirit-stirring strain, with a fine bold swing in the melody, and better worth hearing than that slaughter of Handel and Haydn which the audience will have to assist at before the entertainment is over.

Competitors in the ancient Welsh minstrelsy being nowhere, the melodious young carpenter has a walk over the course, and receives the prize—half-a-sovereign in a little silken bag, with long ribbon strings, which are entwined about his neck by the fair hands of a damsel, who mounts the platform for that purpose, amidst the applause of the crowd.

The next entry is the great event of the morning. Competing choirs are to sing Haydn's grand chorus of 'The Heavens are telling' for a prize of ten guineas, and an ebony-and-silver baton for the conductor. Profound excitement prevails as the names

of the competitors are announced. Only two choirs have been found bold enough to essay the contest, and, after a brief delay, the first of these, about five-and-twenty young men and women, mount the platform, the conductor stands upon a chair, to be better seen by his band, and all is ready for the start.

There is to be no accompaniment, no symphony to induct the singers in the right path. But from an unseen corner of the tent there issues the lugubrious sound of a tuning-fork. The singers make a dash at the opening note, start off at a hand-gallop, and hold bravely on till they finish breathlessly amidst friendly plaudits.

Choir number two succeeds, and begins with a false start. The pitch has to be given a second, nay a third, time by that lugubrious tuning-fork in the corner—a fact to the last degree ignominious. But once off, choir number two has the best of it; the alto parts ring out more clearly, the time and ensemble are better, and there remains little doubt in the minds of the listeners as to the destination of the ten-pound prize and the ebony baton worth one guinea.

Mr. Evan Jones, the adjudicator (no relation to Mr. Morton Jones, the squire), advances to the front. He is a small active-looking man, with a keen dark face, and a brow not unprophectic of future distinction. He carries a sheet of music-paper, on which, with ruthless precision, he has recorded the errors of the rival choirs. He expresses himself tersely, and with a certain good-natured irony, not displeasing to the audience, however galling it may be to the performers, whose work he criticises.

‘The first choir,’ he begins blandly, ‘sang by no means badly, and in fact the performance was very creditable indeed.’ (The first choir takes courage, and sees its way to the prize.) ‘But they were in too great a hurry to distinguish themselves—the opening movement was taken at a gallop. Now there’s no glory to God in such a stampede as that.’ (Laughter.) The first choir looks crest-fallen. ‘They sang, on the whole, tolerably correctly. There was a G natural that ought to have been G flat; but this we may attribute to nervousness, as well as the fact that they took the large movement presto. The altos were painfully weak; the basses were a trifle

flat. But, on the whole, as I remarked before, we may consider it a creditable performance, and that it does honour alike to their heads and hearts. Now, with regard to choir number two, I am bound to remark that they made a very bad start—took the note wrong twice over ; a very unmusician-like proceeding. If the composer had meant the chorus to begin with that kind of floundering about, he would have so written it. But there can be no doubt that the second choir redeemed their characters after this bad beginning by very satisfactory work. Their time was better than number one ; their forte passages were firmer ; their performance had more light and shade ;' and so on, and so on, through a careful criticism of the performance. 'I therefore feel it incumbent upon me to award the ten-pound prize to the Llanvaerlog choir, and the prize baton, value one guinea, to the conductor of the same.'

Unanimous applause follows the decision. Mr. Slingford Edwards takes a yellow-satin bag from a nail on which it has hung in sight of the audience, looks about him doubtfully for a moment, and then confers in a whisper with the chairman. They are

consulting as to the fair hand which is to bestow this guerdon—the chivalrous practice of the Eisteddfod requiring that each prize should be given to the happy winner by a lady selected from among the more distinguished of the assemblage.

‘Miss Morcombe,’ suggests Mr. Edwards, in a whisper.

‘Yes, decidedly,’ replies the chairman, ‘if she’s here. Couldn’t have any one better.’

This ten-pound prize is the grand feature of the entertainment. The ten-shilling and five-shilling guerdons may be given by anybody, but the donor of the chief prize must needs be a person of mark.

Slingford Edwards slips behind one of those benches on the platform, bends over a young lady’s shoulder—a young lady who sits in the back row, and who has been hidden from the gaze of the public. He whispers a few words in her ear—there is a stir and a gentle flutter around her—she rises, and the Reverend Slingford leads her blushing to the front of the platform, where the expectant choristers wait, closely huddled together and open-mouthed.

‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ roars Slingford Edwards

above the universal hum, 'I am proud—we are all proud, and I am sure you will, every man of you—yes, and every woman—for when was woman's heart slow to throb in unison with man's most generous emotions?—participate in that feeling when I tell you that the great prize of the day will be awarded by Miss Morcombe, the lovely daughter of the most popular landowner—always excepting our respected chairman—in these parts. Miss Morcombe of Lochwithian Priory. Now, Mr. Sparks,' to the conductor, 'down on your knees, and let the memory of this moment never fade from your mind; let it be a stimulus to future exertion, a guiding star to lead you to glory. Why don't you kneel, you blockhead?' sotto voce to the winner of the prize, who looks as if he had only that moment discovered that his arms are appendages of an awkward and embarrassing character, so limp and helpless hang his hands, so painfully angular are his elbows.

'Three cheers for Miss Morcombe of Lochwithian,' cries Mr. Edwards; whereon the audience, who have had to do a good deal of cheering already, respond feebly, with flagging energies.

The prizes are given—first the baton, and then the yellow-satin bag; and Miss Morcombe curtsies and retires, led by the gallant Slingford. During the last five minutes she has been the focus of every eye, but no eye has gazed more intently than the eye of Herman Westray.

‘What a sweet-looking girl!’ says Mr. Westray to his companion.

‘Yes, she’s nice, isn’t she? I’ll introduce you, if you like. She’s very clever—likes literary people—likes to talk about them, at least; for I don’t think she knows many. Serious girl—Anglican.’

‘Gets up at five o’clock on saint days, I suppose,’ says Herman. ‘Rather a trial, I should think, that kind of girl.’

‘I withdraw my offer to introduce you,’ says Mr. Dewrance, with a disgusted look.

‘O, nonsense! I should like to know her. What would her getting up at five o’clock matter to me? I am but a bird of passage. Yes, she looks clever as well as pretty, and looks good into the bargain. A fine firmly-moulded face, something out of the common in the expression. Put her into a suit of

armour, and she would do for Joan of Arc. Please introduce me.'

'I'll take you over to the Priory to luncheon to-morrow. I have carte blanche to take any one nice.'

'Introduce me to-day. Is that sportsmanlike party with the foxy whiskers her father?'

'Yes, that's Mr. Morcombe—fine fellow—good old Saxon family—pedigree that goes back to Hengist and Horsa—looks down upon people who date from the Conquest.'

'No end of money, I suppose?'

'Humph!' ejaculated Dewrance doubtfully; 'no end of land, if you like, but money dubious—ready cash at a premium. I believe Miss Morcombe inherits something from her mother, but nothing considerable. People who trace their lineage as far as Hengist and Horsa are seldom heavily ingottled.'

'Introduce me, please.'

'Wait till the Eisteddfod is over. I'll ask them to luncheon at the Cambria.'

Mr. Westray sighs. He is not intensely interested in the musical contest. A young person of

eleven is rattling through one of Brinley Richards's fantasias upon a national air, with more patriotic fervour than discretion. There is to be a Welsh song in character after the pianoforte-playing ; and a recitation, Hamlet and the Ghost, after that. So that Mr. Westray, studying his programme intently, hardly sees his way to the conclusion of the entertainment.

‘ Can’t we get out, Dewrance ? ’ he asks fretfully ; but Mr. Dewrance is whispering to the chairman, and has something to say to most of the ladies on the platform, and is, in short, in his glory as arbiter of feminine opinion in Llandrysak.

But, lo, presently, comes an unlooked-for diversion. The sunshine which illuminated the tent a quarter of an hour ago has vanished, and a cold grayness prevails in its stead. Now comes the patter of raindrops on the canvas, heavier and heavier, and the assembled multitude begin to have an uncomfortable feeling that canvas is porous, and that there are, moreover, various holes in the tent through which the rain is already descending pretty smartly, to the detriment of new bonnets. Umbrellas go

up. Mr. Dewrance has three pretty girls clustering under his serviceable Sangster. Murmurs of discontent arise at the back of the tent from eager souls whose vision is impeded by the front ranks of umbrellas. The Reverend Slingford remonstrates with the umbrella-holders ; urges that while the contest is going on they should submit to be rained upon rather than interfere with the enjoyment of the majority.

‘I should like to know who could enjoy themselves in such weather as this?’ grumbles a sturdy farmer in the front row ; ‘there ought to have been a tarpaulin.’

‘We didn’t pay our money to be drenched to the skin,’ ejaculates another.

‘Think of your second crop of grass,’ urges Slingford Edwards, ‘and what a blessing this gentle shower is for you.’

Meanwhile the rain falls faster ; it splashes and patters upon the piano, so that the last young interpreter of Brinley Richards is fain to stop short in the middle of her performance, and the piano is shut, and covered with a green baize. The harp is also

shrouded ; the smart little satin bags are thrust under cover.

The élite upon the platform huddle together anyhow, and little pools of water lie upon the abandoned benches. The Eisteddfod comes to a dead stop, and the only question among the audience is whether it be wiser to stay where they are, or to brave the fury of the tempest in crossing the narrow ridge of common, which lies between them and shelter. Miss Morcombe is standing by her father, sheltered by his umbrella, and enveloped in a dark-blue cloak, which drapes the tall full figure from head to foot. In the confusion that prevails Herman has ample leisure to scrutinise the Squire's daughter unobserved.

Yes, she is handsome, certainly ; but that which most attracts Herman Westray, to whom a handsome woman is no rare spectacle, is the something loftier and nobler than common beauty which distinguishes that innocent young face. The modelling of the features is somewhat large ; there is that fulness of outline which one sees in a Greek statue, not one sharp angle in the face, yet the lines su-

premely regular. The complexion is not fair, but has that fresh bloom which comes of an open-air life; the eyes are darkest gray, so dark that till they turn and meet his own Herman thinks them black; the hair darkest brown, and superabundant, for the thick plaits coiled closely at the back of the head are innocent of padding. Franker, fairer countenance never smiled upon mankind. No dangerous Circean fascination here—nothing of the siren or the Lorelei in this young English maiden—no ‘history’ in her glad young life. Herman feels that he is face to face with happy innocent girlhood, and draws a deep breath of gladness, as if he felt himself in a purer atmosphere than the air of his every-day existence.

A thunder-peal bursts and crackles over the tent. The rain comes down faster than ever, more thunder and lightning, then a lull, and the rain grows less.

‘It’s holding up,’ says Dewrance, who has been to the door to reconnoitre. ‘I really think we’d better get away while we can. You and your papa must come to the Cambria and have some luncheon, Miss Morcombe. I shall be so pleased if you will,

and then you can come back for the afternoon performance.'

'Heavens,' exclaims Westray; 'isn't it all over?'

'No, there's another contest in the afternoon, and a concert in the evening.'

Herman makes a wry face, whereat Miss Morcombe laughs joyously.

'You don't care for our Eisteddfods,' she says, ignoring the fact that he has not been introduced to her.

'I don't admit that. The Eisteddfod is charming in its way, but, like all other good things, one may have too much of it. I pity the people who are coming back to this damp tabernacle this afternoon.'

'Thanks for your compassion,' says Miss Morcombe. 'I wouldn't lose "Rejoice greatly" on any account.'

'There's no rain now, Miss Morcombe. You'd better come,' interjects Dewrance, offering his arm, and they go out—the Curate and his fair young charge in front, Westray and the Squire straggling after. The piano has been opened again, the

umbrellas are down, and another juvenile executant is slaughtering Brinley Richards.

‘O, I’m afraid I forgot to introduce you to each other,’ says Dewrance, looking back. ‘Mr. Westray, Miss Morcombe. Mr. Westray, Mr. Morcombe.’

The Curate has a somewhat offhand manner with these magnates of the land. He esteems them for their ancient lineage, their broad acres, but in his own mind he occupies a higher intellectual level, from which he looks down upon these rustic Philistines urbanely. He is the salt of the earth, without which their life would be savourless, and is calmly conscious of his claim on their gratitude. What can be more magnanimous, for instance, than his presence in this remote Welsh watering-place? Has he not dissevered himself from all the amenities of progress in order to secure the enlightenment of these barbarians?

‘Changeable weather,’ says the Squire with a friendly air.

‘Very. Are you going to have a good harvest?’

‘Yes, it’ll be a great year for cereals. Turnips

are bad, clover poor, and we've had hardly any hay to speak of on account of the dry summer. This is a sheep country; we don't grow much corn.'

'So I perceive. Charming country for ferns. Plenty of limestone. Miss Morcombe is great upon ferns, I daresay.'

'Yes, I think she knows all about everything in that way. She's great in horticulture. I call her my head gardener. You must come over to the Priory and see her rose-garden, and her green-houses.'

Miss Morcombe is questioning her companion meanwhile.

'Did you say Westray?' she asks eagerly.

'Yes, his name is Westray.'

'Herman Westray, the novelist, the dramatic author?'

'The same.'

'How good-natured he looks!' wonderingly.

'Did you expect a laughing-hyenaish physiognomy?'

'I don't know what I expected. He writes like a man who admires nothing, believes in nothing,

despises the world he lives in, and yet he writes so beautifully that one feels as if there were a mine of deep feeling under all that cynicism.'

'A mere trick of the trade,' sneers Dewrance. 'Cynicism has sold wonderfully well ever since Thackeray set the fashion, and these young men out-Herod Thackeray, without a tithe of his genius. They are as melancholy as Solomon in Ecclesiastes, and they inlay their Rochefoucauldism on a groundwork of Byronic passion. They take all the tricks and manners of departed genius and make an olla podrida of their own, and call that literature,' with ineffable contempt, 'and are dazzled by the glitter of their tawdry mosaic, and think themselves geniuses.'

'Mr. Westray doesn't look as if he were conceited,' says Miss Morcombe meekly. She has read his books, and heard of his comedies, and it seems to her a privilege to see him in the flesh. Living amongst agricultural surroundings and purely commonplace people, she may be forgiven if she has over-exalted ideas about a popular writer. After all, it is the Philistines who are readiest to worship

notoriety, which, in their innocence, they mistake for renown.

They enter the pine-wood avenue that leads to the hotel. The sun has shone out hotly again, and all the piny spikes and feathery fir-branches glitter with raindrops, as with innumerable elfin lamps. This avenue is dusky even on the brightest day, offering welcome shade and coolness after the glare of the common.

Mr. Dewrance leads the way to the coffee-room, sacred to the more select patrons of the Cambria. Hospitable preparation has been made for this festival day; the sideboard is loaded with ham and sirloin, tongue and chicken. The Curate makes straight for a small round table in the bow-window that commands the avenue and a glimpse of sunlit common beyond, just the nicest spot in the room. Miss Morcombe and Herman Westray seat themselves opposite each other, the Squire drops into a chair next his daughter, and Dewrance goes to the sideboard to cater for his guests, and to press one of the busy native waiters into his service.

Herman has plenty of time now to study the fair

young face on the other side of the cozy round table. As a weaver of romance he is naturally a student of humanity, and in any stranger may find a type. He looks at this girl thoughtfully, reverently almost. She seems to him a being of idyllic purity. There is a freshness about her beauty, a youthful candour in its expression, which, to his fancy, is the very spirit of rustic innocence ; not the innocence of milkmaid or shepherdess, but of a damsel of lofty race reared in the sweet air of her native hills, simple as Perdita, high-bred as Rosalind.

She is certainly beautiful, more absolutely beautiful than he had believed her at first. The dark rich hair which waves a little at the temples, the pencilled eyebrow, the noble modelling of mouth and chin, might satisfy the most exacting critic. And this is no doll-faced beauty. There is mind in that fair young face.

‘I was so pleased to hear from Mr. Dewrance that you are *the* Mr. Westray,’ she begins somewhat shyly ; ‘the author whose books have given me so much pleasure.’

‘Have you really read them?’ asks Herman,

delighted. 'I did not know my scribble had penetrated so far.'

'Do you suppose we are quite Bœotians? We have our box from Mudie once a month; and I have read, at least I think I have read, all you have ever published.'

'My daughter is a tremendous reader, devours a boxful of literature monthly—travels, biographies, Lord knows what. I believe she thinks herself a cut above novels, unless they are something out of the common. I don't know how she finds time to open a book, what with her schools and her house-keeping and her gardening and her church-going.'

'There is generally one hour in the day that I can contrive to steal for a quiet read,' says Miss Morcombe, 'and perhaps I enjoy my books all the better because I am obliged to limit my enjoyment.'

'Have you so many duties?' asks Herman, with only a languid curiosity. His interest in the Squire's daughter does not extend beyond her face. He is in no wise concerned to know the manner of life she leads in her barbarous fastness amid the wild fern-clothed hills.

‘Many duties!’ exclaims Dewrance, coming back laden with a salad-bowl and cruet-stand, and attended by a waiter with roast fowls and tongue and a dainty shoulder of lamb. ‘I should think she has indeed. There are not many parish priests who work harder than Miss Morcombe. You should see her schools. I don’t know any in England so perfect, on a small scale of course, but absolutely perfect.’

Herman pushes back the loose brown hair from his forehead and gazes at Miss Morcombe with a puzzled look. He has ever detested everything that verges upon strong-mindedness, independence, self-reliance, in a woman. The women he has admired hitherto belong to the papilionaceous tribe; women who are more concerned in the supply of stephanotis at Covent Garden than in the price of bread; women who are ready to die if they miss a favourite opera, and have neuralgia if their dressmaker disappoints them; women who are ‘a little low’ on the slightest provocation, and require to be sustained with pints of Pommeroy or Cliquot between breakfast and kettledrum; women whose high-priestess is fashion,

and whose religion is dress; whose gravest reading is a *risqué* social article in the *Saturday Review*, and whose poetry and sentiment are derived from modern French novels.

Such women as these Herman has hitherto found ineffably charming; not good enough for marriage, or the unrestrained confidence of friendship, but delightful for airy social companionship. Women with whom to waste a summer afternoon at Wimbledon or Hurlingham; with whom to discuss the last fashionable scandal in cleverly-chosen half words; from whose fair hands to receive the refreshing cup of orange-scented pekoe, or the invigorating glass of vermuth. With such as these—the lilies of life's field—he has gaily ridiculed the women who toil and spin—the women with mind; the serious virgins who rise at cockcrow on saints' days, and are never found with lamps untrimmed. He has ridiculed feminine effort of all kinds—philanthropic, artistic, Evangelical, or Anglican; has scouted the idea of feminine duty; and has taken for the motto of his ideal woman the lotos-eater's listless burden, 'Let us alone.'

And now behold him face to face with a young woman whose duties are manifold, and whose calmly beautiful face impresses him as no other face has done since those days of adolescence when every fair-haired school-girl seemed a Helen.

They talk about literature, Dewrance expounding positive opinions in that sledge-hammer voice of his ; Herman less vehement, but more trenchant, his wit having a sharper edge than the Curate's. Miss Morcombe talks unrestrainedly ; her favourite poet is Tennyson ; her favourite poem, the *Idyls of the King*. For the sensuous in art and poetry she has no sympathy—nay, she shrinks from the very names of those writers who are its chief exponents, and is silent when Herman praises a singer of the De Musset school. She has read no French novels, but she knows Châteaubriand and Lamartine by heart, Herman discovers. Rococo rather, thinks the modern man of letters, with his catholic appreciation of modern turns of thought. This Squire's daughter seems to him tolerably well read in all that is best worth reading ; a being of infinite knowledge as compared with his lilies of the field, who take a

pretty pride in their ignorance, and make it, as it were, a new accomplishment to know nothing.

Dewrance talks of art while he mixes the salad. He is a man who has travelled much, and learned many things; among others, the making of a salad, on which he prides himself.

‘What an insipid business luncheon is in a country hotel!’ he exclaims. ‘Now I could take you to a restaurant in the Seven Dials, where I used to go a good deal before I was in orders, and give you half a dozen *hors-d’œuvres* by way of appetisers. Here one must put one’s trust in a bowl of lettuces—no tarragon or chervil—not an anchovy for love or money—the nearest lobster to be heard of at Tenby.’

Miss Morcombe confesses to an appetite which does not require to be stimulated by anchovies or caviare.

‘Papa and I breakfasted at seven,’ she says, ‘and I’ve no doubt we shall do justice to our luncheon.’

‘Strange!’ thinks Herman; ‘here is a woman not ashamed to admit that she can eat.’

His social sirens have, for the most part, lan-

guid appetites, but a considerable power of suction. They exhibit a placid unconsciousness when attentive serving-men fill and refill their glasses, and absorb the contents thereof unawares.

The luncheon proceeds gaily. Dewrance is always good company, and the others have plenty to say. The Squire eats and drinks and holds his peace. He is neither literary nor artistic ; his tenants have been backward with their rents lately, and he has cares which make him thoughtful. Herman looks at him, and wonders how a man so eminently commonplace can have such a daughter.

Two o'clock strikes, and the room grows clear. The second part of the Eisteddfod begins at half-past two. Miss Morcombe puts on her gloves, an operation which Herman watches attentively, as if it were the most interesting spectacle to see pale-gray kid-gloves drawn upon a pair of dimpled hands, not so white as the hands of those sirens he wots of—somewhat sunbrowned, indeed, but the perfection of form.

‘I think it is time for us to go, papa. You have to take the chair, you know, this afternoon.’

‘Yes,’ sighs the Squire, ‘it’s a pity Jones doesn’t do it. He’s better at that kind of thing than I am.’

‘O but, papa, you know what you ought to say; the pleasure you feel in the development of native talent, the softening and elevating influence of music, how it brightens all our homes—the humblest as well as the loftiest; and how glad you are to see so many familiar faces round you, all smiling and happy; and how you hope this first Eisteddfod ever held at Llandrysak will not be the last; and how you will do your utmost to maintain the custom among us; and so on, and so on.’

‘I shouldn’t want any “so on” or “so forth,” if I could get through all that,’ says the Squire. ‘You women have such glib tongues. I wish you could speak the speech for me, Editha.’

‘I wish I could, papa. I should like to stand up among the people I’ve known from childhood, and tell them how I love their customs and themselves. Indeed, I wish I could.’

‘And indeed, Editha, you would do it well, and they would like to hear you.’

They rise to go, Dewrance and Westray both in attendance.

‘You won’t care to hear any more of the Eisteddfod,’ says Miss Morcombe, smiling at Herman.

‘Yes; I mean to attend afternoon service—I beg your pardon, Dewrance, the afternoon contest.’

‘But you were tired of the music this morning.’

‘I shall not be tired this afternoon. If five-and-twenty young Welshwomen come forward one after another to sing “Angels ever bright and fair”—it’s in the programme, I think—and hold on for hours, I will show no sign of impatience. I will stand “Pious Orgies” like a lamb. I will submit unconditionally to the Welsh song in character.’

‘I’m glad you have a corner of your heart to spare for our dear old country,’ says Editha, with a pleased look.

‘I only hope that I may not leave more than a corner of my heart in your principality,’ he answers, with ever so slight a smile.

They go back to the tent in the sunlight. All the scene is gay and bright; no more umbrellas.

Smart bonnets and feathered hats shining out, little the worse for the morning's rain ; faces smiling and rubicund, after copious refreshment of a teetotal character at Mr. Cates's.

Squire Morcombe makes his speech, on the lines laid down by his daughter. If trite and somewhat feeble, he at least appears friendly, and the audience cheer lustily. The harp strikes up with a lively Welsh air ; then comes ' Pious Orgies,' by divers working men in their Sunday clothes, who acquit themselves not amiss, for these Welshmen have a natural love of and capacity for music, and sing part-songs with the zest and tunefulness of German students troling out their Volkslieder.

The afternoon wears on ; there is a good deal of repetition, but Herman Westray endures with resignation. He is seated next Miss Morcombe, and is making a study of her character, with a view to putting it to some literary use by and by. He talks to her in the pauses of the entertainment, which are numerous ; and although ' Angels ever bright and fair' has been sung seven times consecutively, he thinks the contest rather too short

than otherwise when all is over, and Mr. Morcombe takes his daughter to the wagonette which is waiting for them outside, in company of various other conveyances.

‘I wish you were going to stop for the concert,’ says Dewrance.

Herman says nothing, but has desires upon the same subject.

‘I wish we were, but it is such a long drive to the Priory, and papa likes to dine at home.’

‘Never got a decent dinner at Llandrysak,’ answers the Squire decisively. ‘Bring your friend over to-morrow, Dewrance, and let him see the ruins, and Editha’s conservatories.’

‘I should be too delighted,’ says Westray, not waiting for the Curate to respond.

‘I’ve been thinking of bringing him,’ replies Dewrance, ‘remembering what you were kind enough to say about my friends.’

‘Of course, of course. Be sure you come early; we lunch at two.’

Miss Morcombe is seated in the wagonette by this time; they all shake hands with effusion.

‘Auf Wiedersehen,’ says Herman, as he releases Editha’s hand, with just that shade of tenderness which he is apt to assume in his converse with women. A mere trick of tone and manner, perhaps, but not without effect.

‘Editha,’ he says to himself softly, as he and Dewrance walk up the avenue; ‘a fine Saxon name. It suits her admirably.’

‘Well, what do you think of Miss Morcombe?’ asks the Curate briskly. ‘A superb girl, isn’t she? A woman worth any man’s winning.’

‘A woman to make a good man a noble wife,’ answers Westray gravely; ‘but a woman whom a worldly man ought to avoid.’

‘Why?’

‘Because she is not of the world, but above it.’

‘Can a man have too good a wife?’ asks Dewrance incredulously.

‘I can imagine no greater misfortune for a man than to be mated to a woman who is above him.’

‘His self-respect or vanity would be wounded by finding a superior in his wife; is that what you mean?’

‘I mean that his whole life would be out of joint. To be reasonably happy, or fairly united, a man and his wife should be on the same level. No good ever came, in legend or fairy tale, of the union of mortal and immortal.’

‘Ah,’ sighs the Curate dubiously, ‘you have such a romantic way of looking at things. I only wish I had a shadow of a chance with Miss Morcombe;’ this with a deeper sigh. ‘I am not too proud to say that I think myself infinitely below her, yet I am bold enough to believe that I could make her life happy and my life worthy of her.’

‘That is quite possible. But you are a better man than I. You have definite aims, and high ones. You are in earnest, and have proved your earnestness by the sacrifice of worldly advantage. Now I have no aim beyond winning a certain measure of transitory popularity, and as much money as publishers or managers will give me for my wares. Nothing earnest, nothing exalted there. And how could such a life as mine mate with Miss Morcombe’s? There is not an hour of the day in which our opinions and feelings would not differ.’

‘Provided that you have not committed murder or forgery, and that your worst sin is want of earnestness, I don’t suppose that Miss Morcombe would be afraid to undertake your reformation,’ says the Curate, with a shade of bitterness. He has seen that Westray has made more impression upon the lady’s mind in a few hours than he has been able to make in two months, despite the fact that Editha’s sympathies are all with him and his work.

‘Upon my word, Dewrance,’ says Herman seriously, ‘if I thought there were the slightest danger of my falling in love with that young lady, I would pack my portmanteau, and go back to London by the mail.’

‘If you are of that way of thinking, pack your portmanteau,’ replies Dewrance with energy. ‘Editha Morcombe is not a woman for whom a man can measure his regard. To know her is to admire her; and who can tell in what moment admiration may ripen into love?’

‘I am not afraid,’ answers Westray lightly. ‘In the first place, I have long since used up my

susceptibility, and in the second, I detest strong-minded women. Now while I admit that your Miss Morcombe is eminently noble, I can see that she is strong-minded.'

'She is certainly not weak-minded, and she thinks for herself.'

'Precisely. Now a woman who thinks for herself would never do for me. My wife—if ever I marry—must be subordinate as the moon to the sun. I will love her and cherish her and work for her, and her wigwam shall be as fair as my toil can make it; but my squaw must be a fond and gentle creature, whose thoughts and likings will take their colour from mine.'

'Heaven forbid that Editha Morcombe should ever be reduced to such a level!' ejaculates Dewrance fervently.

'My dear fellow, there is no such thing possible.

"It were as well that I should love a star,
And think to wed it."

CHAPTER II.

'Hélas je n'oserai vous aimer, même en rêve !
C'est de si bas vers vous que mon regard se lève !
C'est de si haut sur moi que s'inclinent vos yeux !'

THE Squire's injunction to be early has not been forgotten. Mr. Dewrance and his friend drive away from the pine-groves of the Cambria on the stroke of noon. The day is warm and bright, the sky almost Italian; the russet hills in the background of the landscape, the verdant undulations of the foreground smiling under a vault of cloudless sapphire; a day on which the mind goes to sleep, and the sensuous delight in sunshine and beauty is paramount in every breast; a day on which life loses the sharp edges and angles of care and thought, and lapses into the indistinct sweetness of a dream.

Dewrance drives the dog-cart. He is always ready for the active duties of life; Westray sits beside him, for the most part silent, looking dream-

ily at the landscape, which, after the first three miles, is new to him. They enter a region of wooded banks, where oak and larch and mountain-ash grow tier above tier on rough ledges of earth rising sheer like a wall, and held together by fern and interwoven roots; a region of loftier hills and deeper valleys; a region of infinite beauty.

‘Yes, it’s a pity,’ says Herman at last, after a long silence.

‘What’s a pity?’

‘That you and Miss Morcombe can’t make a match of it. You would suit each other admirably.’

‘Perhaps,’ says Dewrance; ‘but unfortunately she doesn’t see things in that light.’

‘Time may open her eyes to the fact.’

‘Do you think if I had any chance of success that I would take *you* there?’

‘What, have you so exalted an idea of my fascinations?’ asks Westray, with a little laugh.

‘I think you are just the kind of man to attract the fancy of a girl brought up like Miss Morcombe.’

‘Well,’ sighs the man of letters, ‘I have told you my ideas about marriage; but even those are purely abstract notions, which I doubt if I shall ever reduce to personal experience. I am remarkably well off as a single man; I enjoy ever so many privileges and pleasures which I should lose if I were to marry. I earn more than enough money for my own requirements, and, indeed, have been able to invest a few superfluous thousands. I live just the life that pleases me. Why should I exchange the known for the unknown—placid contentment for uncertain bliss? Why assume responsibilities which may or may not be counterbalanced by the joys they bring with them?’

‘You live the life that pleases you, you say,’ replies Dewrance, contemplating his friend with grave scrutiny. ‘Is there nothing unworthy in that life—nothing you would shrink from revealing to your mother or your sister?’

‘Nothing—now,’ answers Westray. ‘I do not say that my life has been altogether blameless, or that there have not been episodes in it which I look back upon with regret.’

‘And at two-and-thirty you hope to escape all future temptation—all peril of peace or character—without the safeguard of wife and home?’

‘Why not? You are content to stand alone.’

‘I have my duty, which is more than wife or children,’ replies Dewrance gravely. There is a quiet depth of earnestness in the Curate’s character, despite its surface lightness.

‘It was the wisest of mankind who said that the man who marries has given hostages to Fortune,’ says Westray. ‘Now I am not so sure of Fortune that I care to engage myself to her so heavily. Fortune may be friendly enough to a bachelor who asks her for no more than a second-floor in Piccadilly, and the run of two or three clubs; yet may turn her back upon a married man who has to pay house-rent and taxes, servants’ wages and milliners’ bills, and to take his wife and babies to the seaside, and send his eldest boy to Eton.’

Dewrance answers with a sigh.

‘I am willing to admit that civilised life is a problem,’ he says. ‘The Maories have no such difficulties.’

They are descending into a valley, a deep cleft between two hills; a narrow river—sorely shrunken at this dry season—flows over its stony bed at the bottom of the gorge, and in a verdant hollow between the river and the higher ground along which the dog-cart is driving lie the ruins of Lochwithian Priory.

Little of these remain — neither archway nor tower — only the solid foundations of chapel and cloisters, the massive stonework that formed the steps of the high altar, the broken base of a clustered column here and there at an angle.

‘The monks of old had a knack of finding the pleasant places of this earth,’ says Westray. ‘Valleys flowing with milk and honey, hill-sides famous for unapproachable mutton, woods peopled with game.’

‘And they occasionally planted themselves on such fertile spots as Mount Athos or St. Bernard,’ answers Dewrance, whose Anglican mind has a keen sympathy with the Church of the past.

‘I daresay the Priory kitchen was built over that trout-stream, and that the scullions washed their dishes in the running water,’ says Westray. ‘But

pray where do our friends reside ? Do they encamp among those low walls, or have they a comfortable cavern in the hill-side ?

‘ The new Priory stands before you,’ replies Dewrance, pointing to it with his whip.

A wind in the road has brought them face to face with the mansion of the lord of the soil ; by no means a modern habitation, but of the Elizabethan era, with steep gables, mullioned windows, and oriel here and there at a corner. The house is built upon the slope of a hill, and stands above the raised road along which Dewrance and Westray are driving. It is large, rambling, irregular, and has evidently been expanded, but not within the last century. Time has mellowed the tints of the masonry, deepened the dark red of the brickwork, embroidered the massive chimney-stacks with mosses and lichens. The garden lies on a southward-fronting slope, and one can fancy that the red wall yonder, behind the house, and on a higher level, is rich in ruddy peaches and apricots ; an old-fashioned garden overrunning with flowers. Straight gravel-walks intersect square grass-plats. Here

stands a stone sundial, there a quaint old fountain. Raleigh might have smoked his peaceful pipe in just such a garden.

‘Thank Heaven it is not a perky modern place, all stucco and stuckupishness,’ cries Herman.

‘You dislike modern houses?’

‘I would go ever so far out of my way to avoid living in one; and if I could not afford Queens-square, Westminster, would prefer Bloomsbury to Belgravia. Even Abbotsford, despite its cherished associations, jarred upon me a little because I knew its mediævalism was all carton-pierre.’

They are at the lodge-gate by this time. Below them, at the bottom of the valley, walled-in on three sides by hills, stands a gray stone church with a tall spire, modern Gothic—small, but perfect; beside it the village school, a pretty Gothic building, larger than the sparse population of the district would seem to warrant. An inn of no great pretensions—the inns in Wales are of small account—and a little cluster of cottages make up all that is visible of the village of Lochwithian. Westray looks about him wonderingly.

‘It is like the end of the world,’ he says.

The gate is opened, and they drive up to the Priory. The fine old timber porch offers a cool and shadowy shelter from the blazing day. The door within stands hospitably open, and they can see the hall, with its darkly-bright oak-panelling, and fitful gleams of colour, and flash of armour against the deep-hued wood. The light from a painted window plays and flickers upon the carved coat-of-arms over the lofty chimney-board, and leaves the rest of the hall in shadow. A family portrait looks out here and there through the dusk.

‘What a delicious place!’ exclaims Herman. ‘Miss Morcombe will inherit this in due time, I suppose?’

‘Not unless her two brothers and their young families perish untimely in order to make room for her.’

‘She has brothers, then?’

‘Yes; one, a captain of artillery, in Bengal; the other, incumbent of a small living in Devonshire. Both of them married, and richly provided with olive-branches.’

‘Has she any sisters?’

‘One, whom she idolises; older than herself; a confirmed invalid; something amiss with the spine. She rarely leaves her own room, or receives visitors; but she and I are firm friends.’

Three or four dogs come out to look at the arrivals, and recognise Dewrance, and are friendly to obtrusiveness: an old Scotch deerhound, a couple of greyhounds—numerous in this part of the country—and a black-and-tan collie; which last the Curate distinguishes with especial kindness.

‘Good Lancelot, brave old Lancelot!’ he says, as the animal fawns upon him.

‘The collie is Miss Morcombe’s favourite,’ remarks Westray sagely.

‘How do you guess that?’

‘By induction. The favour you showed him enlightened me.’

After the dogs appears an elderly serving-man, who rings the stable-bell, and takes the visitors under his charge. Before he can conduct them to a reception-room, a deep-set oaken door opens, and Editha Morcombe comes out of its shadow to greet them.

Her dress is of some palish-gray stuff, of wide sweeping folds and simplest fashion, altogether regardless of the last puffing, pleating, quilling, flouncing, or gaging ordained by Parisian man-milliners. Her dark-brown hair is arranged with classic neatness ; she wears a linen collar, fastened with a knot of rose-hued ribbon. And thus attired, tall, *svelte*, with a certain dignity of carriage which harmonises with her nobility of feature and expression, Editha Morcombe seems to Herman Westray the most perfect woman he has ever seen. She is not the most beautiful, or most bewitching, or the loveliest, or handsomest of her sex ; she is simply the most perfect. She entirely realises to his mind those deathless lines of Wordsworth's, about

‘A perfect woman, nobly plann’d,’ &c. &c.

She welcomes them with a gracious cordiality ; her manner to the Curate softened by a gentle reverence, which recognises his sacred calling even in the familiar converse of every-day life.

‘Papa is busy with his bailiff,’ she says, ‘but will join us directly he is disengaged. Would you

like to see the gardens before luncheon? We have just half an hour, and we can show you the church and schools in the afternoon.' This to Westray.

'I should like to see the garden of all things. From the glimpse I had of it as we came I fancy it is quite my ideal garden.'

'Really!' she exclaims, brightening. 'I am so fond of our garden: it reminds me of Tennyson's poetry; something dreamy and placid and quaint and old. You know the garden in *Maud*?'

'I know that there is a garden in *Maud*, and that the heroine is invited to walk in it at just the most unhealthy period of the morning—typhoid and diphtheria rampant; but I haven't the faintest idea what the garden was like; whether it consisted of one acre or ten; whether it went in for ribbon-bordering and bedding-out plants, or essayed the classical, with marble statues and conical cypresses and junipers.'

'I know *Maud's* garden by heart, and it was like ours,' says Editha, smiling, as she leads them out into the sunshine.

It is a dear old garden; that one fact is not to

be denied. The atmosphere is all warmth and perfume. With the odours of manifold Dijon roses, carnations, jasmine, clematis, mignonette, lemon and oak-leaved geranium, tuberose—all sweet flowers that blow—is mingled the thymy scent of pot-herbs, the savour of ripe apples from the kitchen-garden and orchard near at hand.

There is no costly range of hothouses, like the Crystal Palace in little, but here and there, in odd corners, they come upon a small low-pitched greenhouse squeezed into an angle of the wall, and costing perhaps ten to twenty pounds in the building, full of loveliest exotics or rarest ferns, the cultivation of which is Miss Morcombe's peculiar care. Not for the decoration of a luxurious boudoir, where she may dream her idle hours away, does the Squire's daughter cultivate flower or fern. The best of them are saved for the adornment of that little Gothic church which Herman has marked in the hollow. It is to make that beautiful on saints' days and church festivals that she rears her seedlings, and rises betimes to tend her fernery, and plans and arranges her succession of fairest blossoms. She

has flowers enough and to spare for the beautification of her father's house—especially her invalid sister's rooms—but the church is first in her thoughts and aims. Nor are her pains altogether without tangible reward. The country people flock from far and near to Lochwithian Church at Easter and Whitsuntide, on Ascension-day and at the Harvest Thanksgiving; and Editha's soul is gladdened by the enthusiasm of that rustic flock.

One of the modest little greenhouses is a very bower of stephanotis; the delicate tendrils clothe the low sloping roof like a vine, the waxen sprays hang in overpowering profusion.

'One might invent a new suicide here,' says Herman; 'much nicer than charcoal—done to death with sweetness. And pray what do you do with all these blossoms, Miss Morcombe?'

'We shall want them all for the reredos and reading-desk at the Harvest Festival,' she answers; whereupon Mr. Westray discovers that the fairest produce of her garden is dedicated to the church.

'A pretty amusement for young ladies, church decoration,' he remarks lightly; 'much better than

point-lace or decalcomanie, and with some use in it, since the Beautiful is not without its influence upon the masses. But, for my own part, I prefer some solemn old abbey where never a flower has bloomed save in stonework sanctified by ages.'

'You can't have your solemn old abbey in every parish,' answers Dewrance, 'and while man's art can only glorify a city shrine here and there, God gives us flowers enough for every village tabernacle.'

Herman shrugs his shoulders. He thinks the subject hardly worth serious discussion. He has a dim sense of devotion in shadowy mediæval cathedrals, or looking at Vandyke's awful picture of the Crucifixion in the church at Antwerp, but his religion is like that of many men in his generation—nothing particular. Yet he has a feeling that religion is a very pretty thing in Editha Morcombe, and that this love of flowers and church decoration is a sweet and womanly sentiment. She is very good to the poor, Dewrance has told him, to little children, to the old and feeble, to the sick a very angel of consolation and love. All these things seem good in her, and he feels that she is too good for him; that it would

be better for him to marry a milliner or a ballet-girl, who ate peas with her knife, and had hazy ideas as to the objective case, than to be mated to such purity as this.

He sighs as he emerges from the stephanotis bower, and is so lost in thought, that he runs against an energetic gentleman, stout and clerical, with a kindly smiling countenance, and a bull-terrier under his arm. This is Mr. Evan Petherick, incumbent of Lochwithian, and Editha's great ally. A saintly man, if unselfishness, kindness of heart, and unremitting toil for others are in any wise the elements of saintliness.

'Dear Mr. Petherick,' says Editha, turning to him with an affectionate look—he is a second father, or at least an adopted uncle, in the household—'how good of you to come when I asked you! I knew you would like to meet Mr. Dewrance, you and he get on so well together. Mr. Westray, Mr. Petherick.'

Mr. Petherick, who has very little leisure for general literature, greets the stranger somewhat carelessly, and does not take the trouble to inquire if

this young man is *the* Mr. Westray. He pounces upon Dewrance, and the two divines walk off together by the sunny wall, where the peaches are ripening behind old fishing-nets, and talk clerical talk, and are happy.

‘I should like to look at that old sundial, Miss Morcombe, if I may,’ says Herman. ‘If I may’ means that he wishes her to show him that relic of antiquity.

They walk across the sunny grass together : she, tall and straight and stately—‘queen-rose of the garden ;’ he, taller by half a head, and as thoroughly a gentleman in outward show as she is a lady. He has a faded look, as of having grown pale for lack of daylight. He looks as if he had worked by night, and lived by night, and as if the sunshine and fresh air were a new sensation to him. He has well-cut features, but the outline of his face is too sharp for beauty—no sculptor would choose him for Apollo or Antinous. He has hazel eyes, large, bright, clear, full of vivacity and expression ; hair of a lighter brown than his eyes ; whiskers a shade lighter. The chief charm of his countenance lies in

its mobility; the mouth has an infinite variety of expression. He is a man about whom people rarely make up their minds all at once; a man who improves upon closer acquaintance, his friends say.

He examines the sundial, with its Latin inscription, and then passes on to the stone basin, full of dark weedy water, athwart which gold-fish are glancing.

‘Pets of yours, this finny tribe, I suppose, Miss Morcombe?’ hazards Herman.

Editha is sitting on the broad margin of the pool, and throwing morsels of biscuit to the voracious inhabitants. Herman seats himself near her, and thus from talking of gold-fish they slide into more serious talk—of favourite books, favourite occupations—the dearest interests in the lives of each.

‘You live only to do good to others; I live but to win a shred of fame for myself,’ says Herman at last, with deepest sigh. ‘How sorry a business my life seems beside yours!’

No straighter way to a woman’s heart than self-depreciation. Editha is interested in him from this moment.

‘If no one sought for fame, I suppose there would be no such thing as greatness,’ she replies thoughtfully.

‘The most lasting fame has been won by goodness rather than talent,’ answers Herman. ‘I don’t suppose to Englishmen there is any higher name than Grace Darling’s or Florence Nightingale’s; yet these owe their renown to noble deeds, and not to genius. Come, Miss Morcombe,’ with a slightly bitter laugh, ‘you were praising my books just now; would you like to have written them?’

‘No,’ she answers, raising her candid eyes to his; ‘because to have written them you must have known the worst side of human nature; and God has given me a happy life among good people. I would not have your genius at the cost of your experience.’

Herman sighs, and is silent, looking down at the water and the frivolous gold-fish flashing across and across everlastingly, as if they were in a feverish hurry to get somewhere, and, having got there, panted to go back again. Herman knows young men about town who are as unmeaningly restless as these gold-fish.

A gong booms in the hall yonder. The dogs bark. The two Churchmen, who have been pacing up and down by the peach-wall, gesticulating violently, now turn their steps towards the house.

‘We are wanted at luncheon,’ says Editha ; whereon Herman rises and offers her his arm, which she takes half-reluctantly, as deeming this a needless ceremony.

The dining-room is oak-panelled, cool, and dark, like the hall. Here are more family portraits—Lelys and Gainsboroughs some of them, but mostly uninteresting ; an oaken buffet is well supplied with old family plate ; a rose-water dish in silver-gilt repoussé work ; a two-handled tankard, puritanical and plain, of the Cromwellian period ; and a pair of candelabra. The table is furnished amply, beautified with fruit and flowers ; and the Squire, who has finished with his bailiff—a troublesome man, who wants steam-ploughs and threshing-machines, and no end of expensive machinery—greet his guests cheerfully.

‘I hope your sister is pretty well to-day, Miss Editha,’ says the Incumbent of Lochwithian, when

he has said grace ; and Herman remembers that Editha has an elder sister.

‘She is better than usual, thanks ; it is one of her good days. You’ll go and see her after luncheon, won’t you, Mr. Petherick ?’

‘Certainly, if I may.’

‘And what do you think of Editha’s green-houses ?’ inquires Mr. Morcombe. ‘Very shabby affairs compared with conservatories in general, are they not ?’

‘I never saw ferns and flowers growing in greater perfection,’ answers Herman.

‘My little girl has built every one of those hothouses out of her pocket-money ; and she and Jones the gardener have been the only architects employed.’

‘If Editha told me she was going to build a pyramid like King Cheops, I don’t think I should be surprised, or doubtful as to the result,’ exclaims Mr. Petherick. ‘She has energy enough for anything—that is good,’ he adds, in an undertone.

Dewrance says nothing, but gazes at the Squire’s daughter with eyes of worship. The Squire smiles

with a senile blandness, as if his daughter's praise was a sweet-smelling savour.

‘How they all love her!’ thinks Herman. ‘It would be ridiculous for any one else to do so. She lives in a circle of praise and love. Hard for a man to break the ring, and say “she shall belong to me only.”’

‘We managed to build the schools between us, at any rate, Mr. Petherick,’ says Editha radiantly.

“‘We’ is the idlest flattery on your part,” replies the Rector. ‘You managed to build them; you gave—begged—borrowed the money; you drew the design; you supervised the builders. The foreman told me his men never worked at anything else as they worked at your schools. “We like to oblige the young lady,” they said to him, “and she looks right-down pleased when we’ve got on a goodish bit.” That’s what it is to be popular with the working classes, Editha.’

After luncheon Dewrance is eager to take Herman off to the church, when Editha comes to them, with a curiously earnest look, as if she were about to approach some important subject.

‘If you would not mind, Mr. Westray,’ she begins shyly, ‘I should so like to introduce you to my sister. She is a great invalid, poor darling, and rarely sees visitors; but she has read your books, and been interested in them; and I think she would like very much to see you. So few literary people come our way;’ with a smile.

‘I shall be honoured and happy,’ replies Herman; but he follows Editha doubtfully, fearing that he may be about to be introduced to something unpleasant—something crooked and ugly—a stuffy sick-room, a nurse, and physic-bottles. The rule of his life has been a studious avoidance of all unpleasing things. Even for the purposes of art he has never brought himself face to face with horrors. He has never been inside a hospital, or studied the pauper race in its naked misery, or haunted dead-houses, or penetrated the abodes of crime. His monsters have been developed from his inner consciousness; his morbid anatomy has been exercised on creatures of his own imagination.

He follows Editha up the broad oak staircase, where every newel is surmounted by the Morcombe

crest—a lion sejant and regardant—into a light-some gallery with many doors. One of these she opens, and ushers him into the prettiest sitting-room he has entered for a long time. Boudoirs blue and gold, chintz and satin-wood, ebony and ormolu, he has seen without number, till their very splendour has become hackneyed and commonplace ; but a room like this, in the full glory of the summer sunshine, is new to him.

The walls are painted white, carved garlands of flowers and fruit adorn panelling and cornice, an old Venetian glass over the high chimneypiece reflects a set of dark-blue delf jars, quaint in shape, perfect in colour. In each corner of the room is a triangular glass cupboard, filled with rare old porcelain ; in one window there is a fern-case ; in the other, a cage of tiny crimson-beaked Indian birds. The chairs and tables are of the style made famous by Chippendale ; the draperies are embroidered muslin, lined with rose-coloured silk. On a sofa near an open window reclines the mistress of the chamber, dressed in a white-muslin morning-gown, with rose-coloured bows. There is nothing unpleasant

to affright Herman's eye, nothing crooked or ugly. He sees a graceful-looking woman reclining on a sofa, with a highly-intelligent face turned towards him—Editha's face as it might look aged by ten years, and sharpened by sickness and pain. He is interested immediately. Suffering which assumes no revolting shape appeals to his best feelings.

'Mr. Westray, my sister,' says Editha, after gracious salutations on both sides.

Herman seats himself in the arm-chair nearest the invalid; Editha perches herself on the end of the sofa.

'Now, Ruth,' she says gaily, 'you can ask Mr. Westray as many questions as you like about his books. You know how we have talked of them. Cross-examine him thoroughly; pluck out the heart of his mystery. You won't mind, will you?' half apologetically to Herman.

She is gayer, more unrestrained than he has seen her yet. This elder sister is her second self; she is doubly strong when she has Ruth to sustain her.

'Can I object to the question from such fair

inquisitors?' exclaims Herman, with an amused look.

'Pray, Mr. Westray, how did you come to have such a bad opinion of your fellow-creatures?' asks Ruth gravely.

Herman pulls his whisker with a puzzled air.

'Upon my word, I don't know that I have a bad opinion of mankind,' he replies thoughtfully; 'I like them very well in detail, though in the mass I am ready to agree with Miss Editha's favourite, Tennyson, that "however we brave it out, we men are a little breed."'

'Your books are so clever,' says Ruth thoughtfully; 'but I have always thought it a pity there are not more good people in them.'

Westray shrugs his shoulders.

'My dear Miss Morcombe, goodness from an æsthetic point of view is the reverse of interesting. Faust is not good, Mephistopheles is candidly execrable; but where can you match these for interest? Othello is a grand and faulty being, overshadowed by the splendid iniquity of Iago, for whom he is little more than a foil. Macbeth belongs to the

criminal classes. Virtue is so simple a matter, that it affords few opportunities for art. Vice and crime are complex, many-sided, and offer infinite scope for the literary anatomist. There is no ground for speculation in the fact that a man does right; it is only when he errs that he becomes enigmatic and interesting.'

'Yet Goldsmith has ventured to depict characters that are almost faultless.'

'Goldsmith was a humorist, and could afford to paint virtue. Humour relieves the insipidity of his hero's benevolence; but Primrose described by a man without humour would have been an intolerable nuisance.'

'Thackeray has given us Colonel Newcome.'

'A humorist again. With any one less than Thackeray the dear old colonel would have been an ineffable twaddler. And you will allow that even Thackeray's finest piece of work is not good Colonel Newcome, but bad Becky Sharpe.'

Ruth sighs, and looks at him for a minute or so with dreamy eyes, deep in thought.

'I wonder sometimes,' she says presently, 'that

among so many books written for this generation, there are so few that seem calculated to make people better.'

Westray shrugs his shoulders again, and begins to think this white-panelled chamber is something of a trap. Here he sits, helpless, between two serious-minded young women—he who has ever set his face against female serious-mindedness.

'That is why I love Tennyson,' cries Editha triumphantly; 'one cannot read him without feeling better and braver; he raises the whole tone of one's being. His Arthur is the prince of gentlemen; his Enid is the type of noblest womanhood; Maud, Dora, the Gardener's Daughter, the Miller's Daughter, Lady Clare—who has ever painted such a gallery of true and pure women?'

'One Gretchen—victim and fallen—is to my mind worth the whole boiling,' says Herman irreverently.

Tennyson is the Aristides of modern literature, and younger singers are apt to grow weary of hearing him praised.

Happily for Herman Westray, Mr. Petherick

peeps in at the door, the bull-terrier under his arm.

‘I thought you would like to see Topsy,’ he says to Miss Morcombe.

Topsy is on the sofa in a moment, performing wild evolutions over the invalid’s muslin draperies, and nestling against her pale cheek.

‘Go and show Mr. Westray the church, Editha,’ says the Rector, handing her a key; ‘Dewrance is waiting for you somewhere, I believe. Your sister and I are going to have a long talk.’

Ruth smiles at him tenderly; he is one of her most cherished friends. Those patient fingers of hers are never tired of working for his poor. He tells her all the troubles of his life—other people’s troubles, for the most part—and she gives him comfort and counsel. There is a heavenly repose for him in this quiet room; Ruth’s society is the holiday-time of his every-day life.

Editha and Herman go out into the garden, and by a shrubby path down by the side of the hill, to a little gate which opens into the church-yard.

‘A pretty church, isn’t it?’ asks Editha, looking up at the slim Gothic spire, with its trefoiled finials and quaint waterspouts. ‘My dear mother built it the year before she died. It was her legacy to Lochwithian.’

‘Mother an heiress, evidently,’ thinks Herman.

They go into the church together, and Westray praises the interior warmly.

It is perfect in its way, every detail carried out with extreme care. There is no pretence to splendour, but an exquisite purity distinguishes all. The prevailing tones are gray and white—polished Aberdeen granite and purest white marble. There is a memorial window over the altar—Christ bearing the cross, copied from a famous Raffaele; and on each side a smaller window—one the Good Shepherd; the other, the Light of the World. These make a glow of colour in the narrow chancel.

They go into the vestry, where, over a fine old oak muniment chest, hangs a careful water-colour copy of Vandyke’s Crucifixion—that awful lonely figure against a sky of deepest gloom.

‘Who painted that?’ asks Herman.

‘My sister; she used to be very fond of painting when she was stronger. I do not mean that she was ever very strong, or able to move about much; but she has been weaker lately. The fatigue of holding an easel would be too much for her now.’

‘How sad for her! This copy is remarkably good.’

‘I am so glad to hear you say that,’ exclaims Editha, brightening.

‘Your sister seems to be as clever as she is charming.’

‘You think her nice? It is so sweet to hear her praised. She is so good, utterly perfect, I sometimes think; for I never discovered any fault in her. She has borne suffering with a sublime patience. She is all charity, and love, and thought for others. Sinless herself, she is full of mercy for sinners. When Mr. Petherick has a difficult subject among his people, he brings the person to my sister. I have never known Ruth’s influence fail. She has softened the hardest hearts.’

‘You have reason to be proud and fond of

her,' replies Herman, touched by her enthusiasm. The women of his peculiar circle are not given to unmeasured praise of their sisters.

'And now will you show me the ruins?' he asks. 'I am curious to explore the foundations of the old Priory.'

'I can't imagine what has become of Mr. Dewrance,' says Editha, feeling that she is not behaving fairly to one guest in devoting herself exclusively to the other.

'He is with Mr. Morcombe, no doubt. It is nearly five, and I know he means to leave here at half-past. Please show me the ruins.'

'Come along, then,' laughs Editha, 'if you are so anxious to see them. But there is no reason why you should not come here again.'

'None,' says Herman, 'except—' and at that word stops dead.

Editha does not notice the unfinished sentence. She leads him through the Priory stables, and across a newly-planted orchard to the verdant hollow where the ruins of the old walls stand, lichen-darkened, with mosses, 'spleenwort, and various

members of the ferny tribe flourishing in the interstices of the rough gray stones, honeycombed by wind and weather ; and then when she has shown him the remains of wall and column they cross a little wooden bridge, and stray ever so far along the bank of the narrow stream, the wooded hillside towering above them, and at their feet flowering rushes and yellow water-lilies, and a profusion of forget-me-nots, pink and blue.

Here they talk of all manner of things, and forget the inexorable march of time ; and Herman Westray acknowledges within himself, wonderingly, that even the society of a serious-minded young lady may be pleasant.

‘It is all very well among these Welsh hills,’ he reasons ; ‘one’s mind is attuned to this kind of thing. But if I were to meet Editha Morcombe in London next season, I daresay I should find her awfully slow.’

An hour later, and the two young men have driven away in the dog-cart, after the refreshment of five-o’clock tea, and Editha sits on the end of her sister’s sofa, discussing their new acquaintance.

‘Do you like him, Ruth? Do you think him as nice as his books? You are such a judge of character, darling, I want to know if you really like him.’

Ruth pauses thoughtfully before replying.

‘He has a clever, interesting face, dear; and I think he is better than his books. But then you know they never impressed me favourably, brilliant as they are. Yes, I think him very nice, Editha. But I would not for all the world that you should think of him too favourably.’

‘Why, you absurd darling!’ cries Editha, blushing to the roots of her hair, ‘I have only seen him twice in my life, and may never meet him again. He came here to-day to see the Priory, not to see me. And I believe he is going away from Llandrysak almost immediately.’

‘I hope it may be so, dearest,’ says Ruth; and then, after a pause, resumes with deepest earnestness: ‘O, my darling, you know that, come when it may, our parting will almost break my heart; but Heaven knows that I would not delay that bitter time for an hour if I thought it was

for your happiness to leave me. Let the husband of your choice be but worthy, dear, my warmest affection shall go with him when he takes you from me.'

'Why, you silliest Ruth! who was talking of partings, or husbands, or any such dismalities? Do you suppose I am so wonderful a creature that a man cannot see me without wanting to marry me?'

'If he saw you with my eyes, dear, it would be difficult for him to pass you by.'

CHAPTER III.

‘O Love! thy province were not large,
A bounded field, nor stretching far,
Look also, Love, a brooding star,
A rosy warmth from marge to marge.’

RICHARD DEWRANCE, the curate, is a kindly soul, never happier than when he is giving pleasure to others, whether the objects of his benevolence be a troop of small school-children more given to dispense with the use of pocket-handkerchiefs than society approves, or a band of bright-looking girls, who revere him as a modern edition of St. Paul. Three days after the visit to Lochwithian Priory he is busy organising a picnic—nothing formal or costly; no champagne or perigord-pie; no hired musicians or blue-jacketed postillions, or useless profusion of comestibles; but a gipsy tea-drinking at the Shaky Bridge; for Mr. Dewrance, belonging in some slight degree to the tame-cat family, is a prodigious tea-drinker, and all his ideas of

personal enjoyment include the consumption of carefully-blended pekoe and congou.

The Cambria is a great place for the clerical fraternity. The drawing-room of the Lords is a church congress in little; everybody talks church—stories about So-and-so who has just been made a bishop, What's-his-name whom we all remember so well at Jesus College, the restoration of Penryderch Abbey, the dilapitude of Penmaenmawr Cathedral, schools, Easter offerings, church commissioners, choirs, harmoniums, organs, altar-cloths, rubric, chants, harvest-festivals, are the prevailing topics. Happily these black-coated gentry are usually provided with daughters pleasant or pretty—nay, for the most part pretty; for though the Welsh commonalty are not altogether lovely, gentle blood shows fresh and fair among these breezy hills.

The young ladies are all on the alert for picnics, walks, drives, fern-hunts—what you will.

'We must see the Shaky Bridge,' says Mr. Dewrance at luncheon, seated luxuriously before a salad of his own compounding, with two pretty

girls on each side of him—the off-siders craning their young necks to see and hear him. ‘Delicious walk across the hills—much better than driving round by the road. I suppose you young ladies can all manage a matter of six miles or so, there and back?’

Can they? They laugh at such a question.

‘Well, then, I propose a gipsy tea. We can send everything on ahead, and boil our own kettle.’

‘Which is all the fun of the fair; especially if the wind is the wrong way, the wood damp, and the kettle obstinately averse from boiling,’ says Westray, who has his own band of admirers on the other side of the table. It has leaked out somehow, much to his dissatisfaction, that he is the Mr. Westray who writes novels.

‘A gipsy tea—delicious!’ cry the young ladies.

‘Then that’s decided. Say the day after to-morrow. The weather seems settled.’

‘Glass going up,’ remarks a practical parson.

‘You might ask Miss Morcombe to join us,’ suggests Herman casually.

‘That sweet young lady who gave the prize at the

Eisteddfod? O, do ask her, Mr. Dewrance! She looks so nice,' exclaims Miss Milner, the daughter of a fine-looking jovial Welsh parson, perpetual curate of a distant parish, a man brimming over with quiet humour—a man whose talk, whether lay or ecclesiastic, is always worth hearing.

'She is nice,' answers Herman; 'and this Shaky Bridge is half way between here and Lochwithian. The Squire and his daughter could easily meet us there.'

'Do you suppose the Squire would forego his seven-o'clock dinner for the sake of your gipsy tea?' says Dewrance. 'No; I have a better plan for getting Miss Morcombe. I'll ask Petherick and his nieces, two charming little girls who keep his house, and ask Miss Morcombe to come with them. She's fond of Petherick, and is sure to come if he asks her.'

'Astutest of men!' cries Herman, more pleased than the occasion warrants.

He will see her again—Maud of the rose-garden, with her clear-cut face, not proud but sweet. Yet he can fancy that noble face could harden into pride,

grow fixed as marble, were the noble mind outraged, the strong sense of right assailed, the grand contempt for meanness once aroused. He has seen so little of her, yet the knowledge of her character seems to have crept into his inmost heart, to be rooted there, as if he had known her all his life. Or is it only guesswork at best?

Dewrance completes the arrangements for his picnic that afternoon. He has acquired many accomplishments in his varied career, and is above all things excellent in the commissariat department. He telegraphs to Shrewsbury for the choicest fruit—the strawberries, gooseberries, and currants purveyed in Llandrysak being at once desultory and squashy—and for a liberal supply of those dainty cakes for which the ancient city is famous. He orders cream and butter from a farmhouse among the hills, and a box of crispest rolls and toothsome varieties of fancy-bread from a Polish baker in Regent-street. He is not a man to content himself with the limited resources of Llandrysak.

The day comes—a blazer, cloudless blue, not a breath stirring the pine-branches; every jingle of the

.

tumblers in the pump-room, every click of the billiard-balls in the open-windowed chamber above, painfully audible in the sultry stillness. A glorious day for Flora and Ponto and Scrub, the dogs of the establishment, who lie flat on their sides on the sunny gravel, and growl faintly at the passing stranger—languid remonstrance which, taken in conjunction with the weather, seems indicative of hydrophobic tendencies.

Herman roams restlessly all the morning—in and out, up and down—like a perturbed spirit; now in the dusky pine-grove; now on the broiling croquet-lawn; now in the empty billiard-room, making unmeaning cannons with misused energy. Anon he goes down to the green hollow behind the Cambria, a bosky dell in whose bottom lies a shining lake of clear blue water, rush-bordered, full of deeps and shallows, whereon the more juvenile-minded of the Cambrians do sometimes disport themselves in a shallop, or perchance wherry, with a striped-canvas awning. He stands upon the reedy margin and throws stones into the water, and muses with despondent air, doubtless full of fancies for his next

novel, weaving his plot, arranging his dramatic personages—or possibly thinking of that comedy for Mrs. Brandreth's theatre which he began so briskly the other day, but wherewith he has made but little progress since the Eisteddfod.

‘How my mother would have admired that girl!’ he says to himself, those fickle fancies of his shifting from the phantasmal world of polite comedy to real life and Editha Morcombe. ‘She is just the kind of girl for good women to admire, and for erring men to reverence and—avoid; just too good to make a pleasant easy-going wife. How few men of letters have ever mated with your superior woman! Perhaps Shelley is the only instance—and he found his happiness by a fluke. I daresay Rousseau and Goethe knew best when they reduced their aspirations to the level of their kitchens.’

He throws another stone into the lake, smooth as the placidest millpond this summer noon, and then strolls back to the forecourt of the Cambria, where Dewrance—his arrangements complete, his soul at ease—reclines on his favourite bench, lazily consuming a cigar.


‘What ails thee, sultry wanderer?’ he asks languidly. ‘Thy countenance is disturbed.’

‘It’s consumedly hot,’ replies Herman peevishly. ‘Among your various messages you ought to have telegraphed to the clerk of the weather for a light breeze. You expect us to walk across a broiling hill-side under a flaming sun, and call that pleasure. Any reply from Miss Morcombe or Mr. Petherick?’

‘No, they have not troubled to write. They’ll be there, I daresay; and if they’re not—well, you’ll be all the happier without a serious young woman. Those Misses Pynsents from Swansea are rather frisky than otherwise, and no end of money. Iron, you know.’

‘Iron be—Bessemeréd!’ exclaims Herman ferociously. ‘I think when people receive an invitation the least thing they can do is to reply to it. At least, that is the prevailing opinion in the civilised parts of Europe. In Wales, I daresay—’

‘O, the Welsh do answer letters,’ replies Dewrance. ‘It’s their postal arrangements that are to blame in this case, no doubt. Miss Morcombe has written, and her letter has gone to Shrewsbury, or



London, or Milford Haven, or Holyhead, *en route* for Llandrysak. I shall get it the day after to-morrow, if trains are propitious.'

Herman sighs impatiently, lights a cigar—his third since breakfast—and turns upon his heel.

He goes into the house. A piano rattles violently in the drawing-room, where a young lady is hammering out Thalberg's 'Last Rose of Summer.' There are voices and laughter and banging of doors on the ground floor. Herman looks neither to the right nor the left, but goes up to his own room, a large airy chamber at the back of the house, overlooking the lake and the wooded slopes that rise from it, and the green sheep-walks above, and the little ancient parish church yonder in a cleft of the hills, hard by a farmyard, and little better than a barn—the humblest tabernacle surely that was ever dedicated to divinity.

Herman Westray's despatch-box stands open on the table by the window—a despatch-box whose perfect appliances and elegant luxury might tempt the most slothful of scribes. Mr. Westray seats himself before this machine, plays with an ivory paper-cutter,

screws and unscrews a pencil-case, looks at his watch, ticking soberly in a morocco watch-stand in the lid of the despatch-box, looks at the day of the month indicated on an ivory tablet, and lastly, from one of the pockets intended for envelopes of official size, draws a photograph in a velvet frame.

A woman's photograph naturally, or that thoughtful look—half tenderness, half perplexity—would hardly cloud his face as he contemplates it. A woman's face, delicately painted as a miniature on ivory—not a common face, yet not absolutely beautiful; features small and finely cut, eyes darkest hazel, hair auburn—the real auburn, the rich red-brown of a newly-fallen chestnut from which the husk has just parted. And such hair! It falls over the slender figure like a mantle—falls almost to the knees. The woman is dressed in some loose semiclassic robe, girdled at the waist, high to the throat, but sleeveless, leaving the small round arm bare to the shoulder, the tapering hand displayed to perfection. The photographer must have been an artist who posed the lady for this portrait.

Herman replaces the photograph with a sigh.

‘I ought to write my best for her,’ he says to himself; and turns over some loose sheets of Bath-post closely written upon, and erases a word or a line here and there, or writes a word or line in the margin.

“‘Enter Sir Bergamot Papillion—” No, the comic muse is not propitious to-day. Smiling Thalia averts her face. After all I am not quite clear that I shall write a piece of the Rochester and Sedley period; something classical would suit Myra better, if I could get a happy idea.’

Herman Westray drops his pen, and looks dreamily out of the window. In a general way he goes at his work in a business-like manner—gives his Pegasus a free rein, and gets over the ground at a sharp trot, regular as clockwork. As a rule he invokes no assistance from the Muses, but dips his pen in the inkpot, and writes wittily, wisely, or stupidly, as the Fates decree—but he covers his paper. Time was—nay, not so long ago—when he wrote for bread. He thinks of those days now, as he looks out at the sleepy summer landscape, the warm golden light on wood and hill and water-pools

—thinks of his past life and its varieties of fortune. How, ten years ago, he came home from Balliol to find the good old vicar his father on his deathbed; and how, when the undertaker was paid and other creditors were satisfied, the slenderest pittance was left for the widow and her two daughters—for the son nothing but the work of his head or his hands. The little family at home had pinched and saved to give the lad a university education; and Herman had known this, and had striven his hardest to be worthy of their loving sacrifice. He had taken honours and won a scholarship, and made his father's last days happy with the knowledge of his success. To this son the father committed his helpless wife and girls. 'You will have only Herman to look to, my dears. Under Providence, Herman will take care of you.'

Herman accepted the trust. No lack of earnestness in his nature or straightforwardness in his aims in those days, whatever there may be now. Herman in poverty was almost sublime. He lived upon his scholarship, took men to read with him, utilised his vacations, and contrived somehow to add to his

mother's narrow means. Mother and daughters lived placidly and happily in a pillbox of a house in a quiet Devonshire watering-place, respected, beloved, doing good in their small way. And here, so long as his mother lived, Herman spent the brief holiday-time of his busy life.

When his scholarship expired he came to London, and, by the influence of an old friend of his father's, was placed on the staff of a famous daily paper. He had taught himself shorthand at Oxford, *pour se distraire*, and was able to take his place in the reporters' gallery without delay. In course of time it was discovered that he had a fine slashing style, and from reporting he took to leader-writing, at which patent manufacture of bricks without straw he worked for the next five years of his life; sometimes varying his denunciations of the Opposition, his graphic pictures of startling trial or social tragedy, his humorous essays on breach-of-promise cases, his Juvenalian diatribes against the vices of modern society, with a sound and exhaustive review of some important book. A useful man eminently on a daily paper; well-read, reckless to audacity,

brilliant, various. The time came, however, when journalism failed to satisfy Herman Westray's ambition or occupy his mind; imagination demanded a wider field. He gave his spare hours—time that should have been given to sleep for the most part—to the composition of a picture of modern society; in other words, a novel. The book was published; his fellow-workers of the daily press blew their trumpets loud and shrill, and Herman Westray was famous. There was just enough sparkle, originality, or eccentricity in the book to amuse men; just enough colour and passion to interest women. The novel was therefore popular alike in club and boudoir; and Herman's success fully justified his withdrawal from newspaper work, save for occasional critical articles, the authorship whereof gave him power among his brothers of the pen. His first novel had been followed by a successful comedy, his comedy by a second novel, pronounced an advance on the first. Since then he had written more plays and more novels, and had published a volume of lyrics which some among the critics pronounced not unworthy of Heine, while others denounced

the writer as at once trivial, immoral, and blasphemous.

He had made money also, and had exchanged a second floor in Essex-street, Strand, for chambers in Piccadilly; not large, but costly. He had seen a good deal of the best society, and not a little of the worst. In a word, he had lived his life, without much thought of the future, with some forgetfulness of the past; his mother being dead by this time, and his sisters lacking that influence for good which she had exercised to the last.

And now he has come to Llandrysak for rest of body and mind—sorely needing both—expecting to find here a placid bovine existence, far from the region of fervid desires and ardent hopes. Yet already his mind is fluttered, his body restless; that sweet empty life of the lotus-land remains for him no more. He ought to be lying yonder in some ripple of that ferny hill, looking up at the blue summer sky, listening idly to the hum of vagabond bee, the tinkle of distant sheep-bell.

‘Poor Myra,’ he sighs at last, ‘it’s no use trying to work to-day. Sir Bergamot is dumb as the

Sphinx. The new comedy must stand over till I feel more in the vein. Provoking rather, for I thought I should have dashed off my three acts in a week or so, and taken the piece back to London with me. I know Myra is anxious about her opening piece, and this Frivolity is a serious undertaking for that nervous little soul—or would be serious if there were not resources in the background.'

He sighs, puts away his papers, locks up his despatch-box, and goes down-stairs again, having made as little use of his morning as it is possible for a man to make. In half an hour the luncheon-bell will ring, and luncheon to-day will, for the gipsy tea-party, mean dinner, for they contemplate walking home by moonlight, and it will be ten o'clock most likely ere the Cambria sees them safely housed.

'After all, I came down here for a rest,' reflects Herman, 'and I don't see why I should worry myself into a fever about Myra's comedy.'

He saunters to the pine-grove, where the water-drinkers—looking always more or less like the inmates of a private lunatic asylum—are seated here

and there on rustic benches in a low-spirited manner, doing nothing, looking at nothing, to all appearances thinking of nothing.

Not so Herman. He lights a cigar, and gives himself up to severe thought. He muses on his present condition of life, and wonders if it is altogether the best and happiest existence he could make for himself. It is a pleasant thing to know that when he puts on his hat he covers all his responsibilities; that measles may decimate the infant population, and he be none the worse; that the advance in the prices of coals and butcher's meat can affect him but lightly. Yet it is not altogether soothing to consider that, were he to die to-morrow, there is no one—save those dear girls in Devonshire, on whom he bestows a passing thought once in six weeks or so—who would particularly regret his departure. Yes, perhaps one other person would be genuinely sorry, for a little while; but every thought connected with that other person is more or less a pain, and he shrinks from the question of her feelings.

People are always telling him that he ought to

marry; that it would be better for himself, better for his career, that he should be more heavily weighted in the race of life. Existence is too easy for him, these wise ones say. He is in danger of becoming selfish, cynical, if he has not already acquired the vices of egotism and cynicism. He is in danger of hardening into the bachelor Sybarite who thinks his club is 'going to the deuce, you know,' if his favourite table is preëngaged or his cutlet over-done.

Luncheon is over, and at three o'clock the gipsy party have begun their march, with Dewrance as pilot. He knows every meadow and hill and wooded gorge and watercourse for twenty miles round Llandrysak, though he has only inhabited that inland watering-place for a couple of months. His friends have mustered strong—the ladies in an alarming majority—but Dewrance himself is equal to six ordinary bachelors, and Westray, as a popular author, counts double. Mr. Milner, perpetual curate of an unpronounceable parish in the north, has a knot of admiring listeners to his really delightful conversation. The way by which they go is delicious, through narrow paths, between deep stony

banks clothed with ferns and foxgloves, mosses and lichens, pine-trees rising tall on the rough slopes above ; then past a group of mighty beeches on a grassy knoll, across a farmyard and a wide stretch of undulating meadow land, where the cattle stand at gaze as the merry pedestrians go by. The gates are tall and stiff, regular five-barred gates, and rigidly padlocked against the straying of cattle ; and these Mr. Dewrance and his party have to climb—toil provocative of much mirth. From the last of the meadows they come into perhaps the prettiest bit of all that varied walk : a narrow path on the top of the steep bank of a torrent, deeply cloven in the hill ; a shallow stream rushes over the rocky bed of this wooded gorge, and one just sees the shine of water through the interlacing branches of oak and ash, sapling and undergrowth.

This walk by the torrent winds up the shoulder of the hill.

‘ Don’t look round, one of you, till you come to the top,’ cries Dewrance ; whereupon everybody turns instantaneously, and there is a simultaneous gush of admiration. Behind them, around them

everywhere in the sunny distance, rise the hills, green and brown, darkly wooded, bright with verdure, bleak and barren, craggy and bold, steeped in the summer light, painted against the deep blue sky.

‘How lovely!’

‘Scene-painter!’ roars Westray, in the voice of the gallery demanding Mr. Telbin.

‘You ought to have waited till you got to the brow of the hill,’ says Dewrance, vexed that a *coup de théâtre* should be lost.

They pause again at the gate which crests the hill, and look back again. The panorama is a little wider; they see deeper into the smiling valley, where the river Pennant winds like a wandering thread of silver. They look at the white homesteads scattered far apart among the hills, and think how sinless and placid life might be in such fair solitudes; and every one of them is for the moment as ardent a worshipper of Nature as Wordsworth himself.

The air blows fresh on these green heights, and has a flavour of the salt sea. This wide grassy hill

which they are to cross is called Cymbrie's Bank, the word 'bank' sufficing for the loftiest hill in these regions.

Dewrance walks gaily on with his circle of fair young votaries. He is telling them stories of his foreign experience—stories romantic, tragical, absorbing, to which the listeners lend attentive ears, the Curate excelling in the art of narration. Over that wide green hill, and then along the breast of another hill, and anon they see a sharp peak before them, crowned with a mound or earthen breastwork—all that remains of a Roman fortress, according to Welsh tradition and Richard Dewrance.

They go down the green slope, and into a stony-hearted lane; a lane that should be green and grassy, but which some rural proprietor, for his own pleasure, has paved with rough boulders; a lane which to young ladies with three-inch heels to their boots must be a place of torture. Our Welsh maidens trip across the rugged stones easily enough, and the stony-hearted lane is pleasantly shaded by tall hedges of hazel and sloe, blackberry, dog-rose, oak sapling, and crab-apple, and all sweet things

that flourish by the wayside. After the lane there is a brook to cross, and then a little thicket, a gap in a hedge to get through—and they are at the Shaky Bridge.

He is not a mighty beast, this Welsh lion; not by any means a marvel of engineering as applied to bridges. He consists of a couple of ancient planks, considerably the worse for wear, slung across the narrow river by means of loose wires, which rattle woefully at every step of the passenger. But mild as the beast is, he has wrought terror in many a gentle breast, and Mr. Dewrance's young ladies scream and exclaim not a little as they trip lightly across this primitive suspension-bridge. But if not the bridge itself, assuredly the landscape in which it is set deserves the fame it has won: that placid valley; that winding river, with its ferny banks and over-shadowing trees; that simple village church on the higher ground yonder, with its lop-sided wooden tower, its ivied wall, ivy among which roses red and white have entwined themselves lovingly. The long narrow valley is shut in by hills—loftier crones rising in the middle distance above the fortren-

crowned peak which stands boldly out in the foreground.

‘Well, Westray, do you think the Shaky Bridge is worth a three-mile walk?’ inquires Dewrance of his friend.

Herman has not taken pains to make himself agreeable during the pilgrimage, but has been disposed to hang behind in self-communion, to the aggravation of some of the young ladies, who compare him unfavourably with the Curate, and decide that he puts all his cleverness into his books.

‘Yes,’ replies Herman, looking listlessly round, ‘the scenery is pretty enough; rather teaboardy; but it isn’t Nature’s fault that landscape-painters have vulgarised her: nice little tumbledown old church—“near yonder copse, where once a garden smiled”—and that kind of thing.’

He is angry with Miss Morcombe for not being here; still more angry with himself for feeling the the whole thing a failure without her. There are no signs of her or of the Pethericks. The young man with the light cart, which has brought the

comestibles, is the only human object in the landscape.

‘Now, ladies and gentlemen,’ cries Mr. Dewrance blithely, ‘the first part of the entertainment will be “five, six, picking up sticks,” as the nursery rhyme says. We want no end of firewood for our kettle.’

Away speed the damsels gaily, the younger among the gentlemen active in their assistance. Dewrance takes Mr. Milner to look at the church.

‘Come with us, Westray, won’t you?’ he roars, looking back; and Herman follows listlessly, thinking of that comedy for Mrs. Brandreth’s theatre, and how he is to find a telling situation for the end of the second act.

The church-door is open, and seated in the porch, discoursing with an ancient and toothless female, they discover the Reverend David Petherick, incumbent of Lochwithian, Topsy the bull-terrier curled up at his feet. Herman brightens, and for the moment forgets his inchoate comedy.

He shakes hands with the Reverend David, he caresses Topsy, he peers into the dusky little

church. Yes, she is there alone, standing in a thoughtful attitude, looking up at one of the homely tablets.

‘My nieces are over the hills and far away,’ says Mr. Petherick, ‘but Editha is in there.’

Herman goes in, leaving the three Churchmen in the porch. He is close beside her before she is aware of his coming, and then she turns and looks.

“‘And suddenly, sweetly, strangely blush’d,’” says Herman inwardly, quoting her favourite poet.

Yes, she blushes at sight of him; only the bright brief blush that bespeaks surprise, of course.

‘I did not know you were to be here,’ she says, as they shake hands. ‘In fact, I really thought you had gone back to London.’

He had talked of a speedy departure the other day at Lochwithian.

‘No, I get fonder of your country as I know it better.’

They go round the little church together, looking at the tablets, slate or marble, setting forth the virtues of departed Joneses, Lloyds, Williamses, Morgans, and Davises, and talking a little in sub-

dued tones, as befits the sacred building. Such a quaint, old-world little church, with high wooden pews, square, spacious, but as uncomfortable as the carpenter's art could make them; the benches mere shelves; small latticed windows, squeezed here and there into the walls, with a view to convenience rather than architectural effect, dimly illumine the white-washed interior. The only attempt at uniformity has been in the three narrow windows over the communion table, and one of these has been walled up by a ponderous monument to some departed Prices, who have been a power in the land.

There is not much to look at, but the little there is seems eminently interesting to Herman. He lingers before every tablet; he leans with folded arms upon one of the pew-doors while he questions Editha about her life. He is making a study of her for his next novel; his interest in her is purely æsthetic—on that point he has no doubt.

‘You have never found life at Lochwithian monotonous; never sighed for any wider world?’ he asks.

‘Never. I do not say that I have not sometimes

wished to travel. I suppose that is a natural wish with every one—to see all that is strange and lovely in this wonderful world.'

Herman sighs. For his own part he seems to have turned the world inside out, like an old glove, and left nothing to be desired in it.

'But the thought that Ruth could not go with me, and the thought of how much I should leave behind me in our dear old home,' she resumes, 'has always checked the wish for change or distance.'

'Yet you do not mean to spend all your days at Lochwithian? You might as well be a nun at once.'

'There is nothing appalling to my mind in the idea of a convent,' answers Editha, smiling; 'if there were any vow that I could make to bind me to Ruth, I would willingly make it—her happiness is so dependent upon me, poor darling.'

'Would it not be wise to begin at once to train somebody to take your place, your ultimate departure being inevitable? Some lucky fellow—an earnest young Churchman, for instance, like Dewrance—will persuade you to exchange your

sphere of action for a rather wider one. You will be the ideal pastor's wife.'

'Thanks for the compliment,' answers Editha lightly. 'I am too happy at home to be in any hurry for the coming of the ideal pastor.'

'He will come some day, be sure.'

Poor Dewrance looks in at the door at this moment, showing those even white teeth of his under a somewhat unclerical moustache.

'Miss Morcombe—Westray, we are here to enjoy the scenery; don't waste your time looking at those uninteresting tablets.'

'I have found them full of interest,' says Herman.

They come out of the church at the Curate's bidding, and saunter round the churchyard, which is a curiously one-sided necropolis, the Welsh insisting upon being buried with their faces to the east, so that they may be ready at the great trumpet-call. The humble graves are neatly kept; some curiously paved with pebbles, some decorated with flowers, some with cut branches of box stuck close together, and others with box planted densely and

cut into the shape of a coffin. This last design is evidently esteemed the most *recherché* thing in graves.

They gaze and loiter, Editha explaining all that needs explanation in the rustic scene. They talk freely, as they talked the other day by the rushy margin of the river, and it seems somehow to both of them that they have been friends and companions for a long time.

Herman finds himself talking of his own feelings, his own history; sure sign that his companion is sympathetic, for he is not given to egotistical prosings. He tells Editha of his youth, touching lightly upon his struggles, but owning without reserve that he has laboured for his bread.

‘And now, after pulling against the tide for a goodish time, I find myself at thirty in smooth water,’ he says; ‘and I have nothing to do but drift quietly with the stream and keep on the sunny side of the river, or, in other words, make the most and best of my life.’

‘But you will go on working?’ exclaims Editha, with a surprised look; ‘your ambition is not dead?’

His only answer for the moment is a sigh.

‘Progress is a grand word,’ he says at last, ‘but how few they are who have the elements of progress in their nature ! To go up like a rocket and come down like a stick seems the natural tendency of human genius. Bulwer Lytton, the most varied genius since Shakespeare, is the only man I can think of at this moment whose power was always growing.’

‘Was not that because he had an inexhaustible ambition, and a just and modest appreciation of his genius, and loved his art for its own sake, without consideration of fee or reward ? For my own part, when people say they are not ambitious, I always fancy they mean that they are idle.’

‘Perhaps you are right,’ replies Herman. ‘A man may go on working, and work hard, in a groove, and seem a pattern of industry, without any great mental effort. The strain only comes when he strives to rise above complacent mediocrity.’

And then after a pause he says thoughtfully :

‘I had more ambition before my mother died. Any little success I made was such a delight to her.

Every word of praise given to me was to her a pearl of price. Perhaps if I had some one as keenly interested in my future, I should work harder, have nobler aspirations, be less content with the bread-and-cheese of literature.'

'You have sisters; they must be warmly interested in you.'

'A sister's interest is like a draught of new milk to a thirsty traveller—refreshing, but not inspiring.'

'I would rather have Ruth's praise or Ruth's interest than any one else's,' says Editha.

'Yes, women as a rule like milk-and-water, but even the soberest men prefer a dash of alcohol in their drink.'

They stroll down the valley to the little sheltered nook near the bridge, where the gipsy-fire is blazing merrily, and is the cause of much merriment in others. Tea is ready, but teacups are scarce, and every one cannot be supplied at once. There is the river conveniently close, however, and plenty of teacloths in the basket; so the washing of cups and saucers in the running streams affords

a diverting employment to some of the young ladies and one very young gentleman. Conspicuous among these skirmishers are Mr. Petherick's nieces, who have little to recommend them to notice beyond the length of their legs and the shortness of their petticoats, being in that stage of rapid and inconvenient growth when frocks seem to shrink palpably day by day. Shrewsbury cakes, Polish bread, strawberries, big crimson cherries, are fully appreciated by the revellers after that three-mile walk. Dewrance, in his character of host at this open-air banquet, is simply admirable. The ladies consume orange pekoe in an alarming manner, like the young woman made famous by Sam Weller. The kettle is an inexhaustible source of excitement, and romantic young ladies feel that this is gipsy life indeed. After tea, the younger and more frivolous of the party go and swing upon the Shaky Bridge, to the apparent endangerment of that frail fabric; others wander away in twos and threes, or muster strong round Dewrance.

‘Now, remember,’ he says, as they prepare to scatter themselves, ‘we all meet here at half-past

eight. We shall have moonlight for our walk home.'

'Delicious!' gasp the young ladies; 'you plan everything so nicely, Mr. Dewrance!'—as if he had telegraphed to some London firm for the moon.

Herman and Editha climb the hill in the foreground. He has asked her to show him the Roman earthwork. The sunburnt sward is slippery as glass, save where the bracken gives firmer foothold. Herman grasps Editha's hand now and then in perilous places; not that she has much need of his assistance, for her foot is fleet and firm as Atalanta's. They reach the summit breathless, but not weary, and have the little mound with its scooped-out basin all to themselves. From this height they survey the rest of the picnickers, straying here and there; the group of admiring females round Dewrance; the two pastors, Milner and Petherick, pacing soberly by the river.

'Nice to feel oneself quite away from the rest of the world!' exclaims Herman.

He examines the earthwork, which to the wisest of archæologists says very little—and Herman is no

archæologist. His mind is too purely literary, too imaginative and poetical in its bent, to affect the dry bones of history. Upon his eye all that is fair in the past shines beautiful and glorious like a picture; he has no taste for looking on the other side of the canvas, or for anatomising the bright and living image that charms his fancy.

They seat themselves upon the low bank, and watch the sunset almost in silence. Gorgeously, in billows of crimson and purple, sinks the golden round; fiery and splendid, like the brazen targe of a victor in the fight. Who should find many words in the presence of that awful splendour?

‘Do you remember what Mirabeau said of the sun on his deathbed?’ asks Herman, as the gleaming edge of the disk dips and vanishes in a sea of molten gold. ‘“If he is not God, he is His cousin-german.”’

Far away stretches the undulating landscape, gilded by that western glory. A beautiful world verily; and yet there are so many who prefer the shady side of Pall-mall!

‘Odd, isn’t it,’ says Herman, reflecting upon

this fact, 'that men can turn their backs upon Nature without a sigh, to shut themselves in houses like packing-cases, and tramp stony pavements, and breathe sewer-gas—and like it? What gregarious animals we must be, that a crowd is so attractive to us! A curious indication of how small a world we possess in ourselves individually. Such men as Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge could afford to inhabit solitudes; their crowd was within—their minds were peopled with thoughts and fancies and vivid dreams that were better company than men and women.'

'You speak as if you did not care for the country.'

'I care for it intensely—as a picture; but I doubt my capacity for being happy out of a great city. The press and conflict of life are a necessity of my being. I admire your fine old Priory and its gardens—full of such a tender smiling peace; I wonder at your tranquil even days, as at a fable of some enchanted isle—like Prospero's without Caliban.'

They talk of many things. All too soon it is

eight o'clock—a quarter past—twenty minutes past—and they must go down to the valley where Dewrance is to assemble his forces.

Mr. Petherick has driven Miss Morcombe and his nieces in his pony-carriage—a commodious rather than elegant vehicle, which carries any number, and would move a houseful of furniture at a push. He is to drive them back through the moonlit lanes, while Mr. Dewrance's party wander over the grassy hill and by the mysterious path above the mountain gorge—where the fairies might hold high festivals on such nights as these, if earth had not grown too old for them.

The Incumbent of Lochwithian has enjoyed himself amazingly, and in the fulness of his heart is bent upon making some return of hospitality to the Curate, and the Curate's clerical friend, Mr. Milner.

'Come and lunch with me to-morrow,' he says expansively. 'We won't call it dinner, for that means ceremony, and mine is only a bachelor's box. You'll come with them, Mr. Westray, I hope?'

'I had serious thoughts of going back to London

to-morrow,' replies Herman; 'but I can't resist such a tempting invitation.'

He has a vague idea that in lunching with Mr. Petherick he will have some chance of seeing Editha once more, before he goes back to that world of action and strife which knows her not.

He has the privilege of handing her into the pony-carriage, adjusting her wraps—for her dress is thin and the night-dews falling. They shake hands, and the pony trots away with his load at a complacent jig-jog pace; and Herman feels that the night and the landscape have lost a charm.

He is more thoughtful than ever throughout the homeward walk. The scene is mysteriously lovely in the moonlight—conducive to waking dreams.

'I think I ought to pack my portmanteau,' he says to himself, as they enter the avenue of the Cambria—black as Erebus, save for a shaft of moonshine darting through the pine-tops here and there. 'I feel curiously like falling in love. But then I've taken the disease so often, and found myself so little the worse for it when it was over!'

He does not pack his portmanteau to-night.

CHAPTER IV.

‘ Wenn zwei von einander scheiden,
So geben sie sich die Händ’,
Und fangen an zu weinen,
Und seufzen ohne End’.

Wir haben nicht geweint,
Wir seufzten nicht “ Weh ! ” und “ Ach ! ”
Die Thränen und die Seufzer,
Die kamen hintennach.’

MR. PETHERICK’S bachelor box—a temporary abode which he occupies pending the erection of a vicarage on the prettiest bit of his thirty acres of glebe—is as cosy a habitation as one would desire to find in a day’s journey. It is about half a mile from the village of Lochwithian, sheltered on every side by towering peak or broad green slope with wooded fringe. Rather inconvenient internally, perhaps, looked at from the utilitarian point of view, as the bedrooms have evidently been a subject of minor importance in the builder’s plan, and the staircase an unconsidered trifle. There are two snug sitting-

rooms, however, a neat little doll's-house kitchen, bow-windows opening upon a velvet lawn, and a shrubbery of choicest conifers, on which a previous incumbent has spent his substance and his care.

Mr. Petherick's idea of a rough-and-ready luncheon is by no means discouraging. A big bowl of roses beautifies the centre of the table. Snowy damask, quaint old Swansea china, heavy diamond cut-glass, a forequarter of lamb, a ham, a pair of fowls, a silvery slab of salmon garnished with cucumber, a salad, and a few kickshaws of confectionery, form no uninviting picture. Herefordshire cider, sherry, and claret are the accompaniments of the meal.

The gentlemen have walked over from Llandrysak, and bring appetites sharpened by the clear mountain air. There is much conversation, chiefly of matters ecclesiastical or university reminiscences, to which Herman listens, or in which he joins with a mild interest. His attention is keener presently, when his host begins to talk of Editha.

'Yes, she is a lovely girl,' says Mr. Petherick, in reply to an observation of Mr. Milner's; 'lovely in the best sense of the word. I have watched her

growth as one watches some beautiful flower. I never knew any one in whom thoughtfulness for others was so spontaneous a quality. If I could only see her married to the man of my choice I should be happy, for then I should know Lochwithian would not lose her.'

'The man of your choice is a local power, I conclude?' remarks Herman frigidly, as if this observation of the Vicar's were in some measure an affront.

'Yes; Vivian Hetheridge has one of the finest estates in the county, and is a generous-hearted, right-minded young fellow into the bargain.'

'Young, a landowner, right-minded, and no doubt good-looking,' says Herman; 'strange that a lady should be indifferent to so much excellence! At the West-end of London, now, Mr. Hetheridge would be—like popular securities on the Stock Exchange—inquired for.'

Mr. Petherick does not pursue the subject; but that image of a wealthy and agreeable suitor dwells curiously in Herman's mind. He is speculating upon Mr. Hetheridge's virtues and Mr. Hetheridge's chances as the gentlemen stroll round the Vicar's

garden, and admire the Vicar's poultry, which have free warren under the ornamental timber on the lawn.

Mr. Milner asks to see Lochwithian Church, whereat Herman brightens visibly. The church is so near the Priory, and there is just the possibility of their meeting Miss Morcombe.

'Yes, you really should see the church,' he exclaims; 'it is a gem.'

Mr. Petherick opens the garden gate; they cross a meadow, and find themselves at the foot of the great green hill which shelters that placid vale, where the monks of old made their home.

Much as he admires the church, Mr. Westray does not care about seeing it again. He stays outside with Dewrance—stays in sight of the Priory windows, which look down upon them from above the shrubberied bank.

'I shall go back to London to-morrow,' says Herman.

'You have been threatening me with that calamity for the last ten days. Do you mean to-morrow in a rigid actual sense, or the Shake-

spearian to-morrow, which "creeps on with petty pace from day to day," and is never overtaken by man ?'

'No, I really must go back. I don't get on with my work in these peaceful solitudes. Odd, isn't it? I miss my own particular chair, my books of reference.'

'I understand. You can't write a comedy without Scribe and Benedix at your elbow.'

'My comedy has not progressed. However, I have gained what I wanted—health; and I have reason to be grateful to Llandrysak. Do you know this Mr. Hetheridge whom the Vicar talks of ?'

'Yes, I have met him. A very good fellow.'

'And attached to Miss Morcombe ?'

'Positively adores her; carries the evidence of his hopeless condition upon him, visible to the naked eye.'

'And will end by winning her, no doubt. The eternal fitness of things is in his favour.'

The Curate shakes his head sagely.

'Editha Morcombe is not a girl to be governed by worldly considerations,' he says.

‘We always have afternoon tea in my sister’s room,’ says Editha, as she and Herman go into the hall. ‘You will not mind?’

‘Mind? I should like it of all things. I want to talk to your sister about her painting.’

Editha leads the way to that pretty sitting-room on the upper floor, Herman and Mr. Hetheridge following. The latter is quite at home, and is welcomed warmly by Ruth, who greets Herman courteously, but not effusively.

‘I thought you had forgotten us all, Vivian,’ she says; ‘it is so long since we have seen you.’

‘I have been away for a fortnight. I’m so glad you missed me—a little.’

‘You may call it very much, if you like.’

‘And Editha’—with a glance at the young lady in the riding-habit, who has lingered for a minute or so to rearrange the flowers on the pretty oval tea-table before running away to change her dress—‘she never misses any one. Too busy, I suppose.’

‘I didn’t know you were away,’ replies Editha naïvely. ‘I hope you enjoyed yourself.’

‘O yes. Tenby, to a man who goes there twice

a year, is distractingly gay. I had the charge of my mother and sisters, and was there on duty.'

Editha runs off to dress, leaving Herman seated by Miss Morcombe's sofa. He begins to talk of that copy of Vandyke in the vestry, and of art in general, whereupon Ruth forgets her prejudices and vague apprehensions, and is at once interested. So few people who understand art ever come to Lochwithian Priory.

'You know some of the Academicians?' she inquires wonderingly, upon Herman's familiar mention of a great name.

'Yes, I know most of the fellows.'

'It must be wonderful to live in the midst of such people,' she says, with brightening eyes; 'to hear of famous pictures before they are painted; to know all about great books before they are written; to live in the front rank of intellectual progress, instead of being quite outside the literary and artistic world as we are here.'

'Yes,' says Herman, with his languid air, 'I am inclined to agree with the Laureate about the relative values of life in the wilderness and life in the

city. And yet we metropolitans are poor creatures compared with the children of the mountain and the flood. Look at your friend Mr. Hetheridge, for instance'—with a glance at Vivian, who stands by the farther window poking his finger listlessly between the bars of the little aviary. 'What a magnificent animal! Fresh clear eye, deep chest, straight legs—sound in wind and limb. Intellectual London does not produce that kind of thing.'

'Mr. Hetheridge's physical superiority is his smallest claim to your admiration,' replies Ruth haughtily. Of all who have ever admired or wooed Editha, Vivian is Ruth's favourite.

'No doubt. Men are like horses, and where form is faultless one hardly expects to find vice. And destiny has placed Mr. Hetheridge in a groove from which a man can hardly get askew. Life is no problem to a country squire. Its lines are laid down for him—to be a good son, a faithful husband, a judicious father, a kind master, a liberal landlord, a mild Conservative, with a dash of Liberalism to season his speeches at public dinners and Eisteddfods; to feed the hungry and

clothe the naked—at Christmas time, and to entertain his own class hospitably all the year round; to go to church on Sunday mornings, and ask the vicarage people to all his dinner-parties. What more can Heaven or man demand from the lord of the soil?’

Editha reappears, fresh and blooming, in her simple dinner-dress of gray silk, with ruffles of old Brussels lace at the throat and wrists. The two parsons follow a minute later, and their party being now complete—for the Squire despises feminine tea-fights—they all sit down, a merry circle enough—Mr. Hetheridge having brightened wonderfully at Editha’s return.

He sits next her, and helps in the management of the old-fashioned silver kettle, and attends to the spirit-lamp. He carries Ruth’s teacup to the little table by the sofa, and makes himself generally useful. The whole business of the tea-table appears delightful to him, and he has an air of schoolboy happiness essentially irritating to Herman Westray.

That gentleman manages to enjoy himself not-

withstanding. He is gayer than Dewrance has ever seen him; and he and Mr. Milner have the lion's share of the conversation, and afford amusement to the whole party. Squire Hetheridge sits silent when he has nothing to occupy him about teacups or kettle, and watches and listens, wondering-eyed, marvelling how any two men can have so much to say as these two, whose words jostle each other, whose promptness of repartee seems, to his simple mind, equal to anything he has read or heard of world-renowned jesters.

It is half-past six, when the simple meal is finished; and Dewrance reminds his friend, that the dogcart is waiting for them at the parsonage.

'And you really leave Llandrysak to-morrow?' Editha asks, as she and Herman shake hands, with ever so faint a tone of regret.

'Really. I have been obliged to make it a positive engagement with myself—a point of honour as it were, like having a tooth extracted, or paying one's losses on the Derby—or I doubt if I could have nerved myself for the wrench.'

'You like the scenery so much?'

‘I am absolutely astonished at my own capacity for admiring the beauties of Nature. I should not have supposed that hills and valleys could have so endeared themselves to me.’

‘I am afraid you are not quite in earnest.’

‘I am only too much in earnest.’

They are going down the wide old staircase side by side, the others preceding them, and her hand hangs so near him that he longs to clasp it in his own—he feels his fingers drawn towards hers, as if by magnetic attraction.

‘You read German?’ he asks abruptly.

‘Yes,’ with an inflection indicative of surprise.

‘Then you know all about the elective affinities?’

‘That’s some idea of Goethe’s, isn’t it? I have only read one of his novels. I like Schiller so much better.’

‘A feminine mistake; women read *Werther*, and think that is the beginning and end of Goethe.’

They have lingered on the wide square landing, lighted dimly by a stained-glass window.

‘Are you coming, Westray?’ shouts Dewrance below.

‘Directly,’ answers Herman impatiently. ‘I should so like to talk to you of German literature,’ he continues. ‘How I wish there were any chance of your being in town next spring!’

Editha smiles.

‘It is not the most improbable thing in the world. There is a scheme for a loop line from Pen-y-craig to Lochwithian. I believe papa is going up to London to attend committees and deputations, and I don’t exactly know what. He has promised that if he goes he will take me.’

‘And will you promise, on your part, that if you do come you will persuade Mr. Morcombe to call upon me? I know most of the newspaper people, and might be of some use to him.’

‘I am sure papa will be very glad to see you again.’

‘Are you coming?’ in despairing appeal from Dewrance.

‘One would suppose that dogcart were an express train. Good-bye, Miss Morcombe.’

They shake hands, lingeringly on Herman’s part, and he runs down-stairs, Editha remaining

on the landing, leaning against one of the heraldic lions. His last upward glance shows him the calm fair face, with its frame of dark hair and fresh youthful bloom.

Mr. Morcombe promises to call at Herman's chambers in the spring, or perhaps even as early as February, as the railroad people are anxious to get their bill without delay. And thus Herman Westray leaves Lochwithian, not altogether without hope of meeting the serious-minded young lady again.

'Why did you ask the Squire to call upon you?' growls Dewrance, with a discontented air, as they walk across the meadow, the two elder clerics in advance, discoursing profoundly upon glebe. 'You say that Editha Morcombe is no wife for a man of your stamp?'

'Who talked of wives? I merely wish to be commonly civil when the Squire comes to London.'

'Commonly civil,' echoes Dewrance; 'I've seen curious results come of common civility in my time.'

They go back to Mr. Petherick's bachelor's

box; and being pressed thereto by the hospitable parson, smoke cigars and drink mild infusions of whisky-and-soda-water for an hour or two, and then drive back to Llandrysak in the glow and glory of sunset, which has melted into moonlight before they arrive at the Cambria.

CHAPTER V.

‘A year divides us, love from love,
Though you love now, though I loved then
The gulf is strait, but deep enough;
Who shall recross, who among men
Shall cross again?’

AN autumnal evening; soft, gray, and misty in the country; thick, smoky, damp, and disagreeable in town. The last night of October, and the first night of Herman Westray’s new and original comedy, *Hemlock*; the opening night of Mrs. Brandreth’s brand-new theatre, the Frivolity—altogether a great night in the dramatic world.

For the last week or so the critics, and those outside enthusiasts who make it their business to know all about the inside workings of their favourite theatres, have been discussing Mrs. Brandreth’s future. She is young, handsome, popular, and almost universally admired. Of course there are those unpleasant people, the judicious few, who

think her art a shade too artificial, her beauty somewhat too sharply accentuated by those extravagances of toilette which astonish and delight the multitude. But, on the whole, Myra Brandreth is a favourite with the playgoing public, and it is a matter to be counted upon that the Frivolity stalls will fill nightly, and the Frivolity private boxes—such cozy little nests of velvet and satin—will go off briskly at Mr. Mitchell's. The new theatre has been discussed at West-end dinner tables, with that amiable assumption of knowledge and unconscious ignorance which distinguish the dramatic Sir Oracle. The salaries Mrs. Brandreth is to pay her company, the cost of the decorations, the terms Mr. Westray is to receive for his play, have been stated with an exactness which passes current for accuracy.

And now the all-important night has arrived, and at a quarter before eight the dainty little theatre is packed as closely as if it were indeed a bon-bon box filled with chocolats pralinés and chocolats à la crème. The critics are there in full phalanx, some of them with handsome wives

at their elbows to assist them in forming their opinions, or least to expound the merits of Mrs. Brandreth's dresses. All these critical gentlemen display a lively interest in the event of the night, and have such a good-natured air that it is hard to believe that gall may flow from their pens instead of honey.

The general public is here in full force, having paid its money, eager for the favourite's triumph; but that particular public of literature and art, which in many cases has not paid for admittance, is the most noticeable. These the general public point out to each other, and whisper about, while the band plods resolutely through a set of German waltzes, to which nobody thinks of listening.

The private boxes are all full, in some cases to repletion; pretty faces, bright dresses, line the theatre. It has been so artfully designed that the gallery, though a fair place for seeing from, is almost invisible to the parterre and boxes, being, as it were, effaced by a dome of gilded lattice, the most noticeable feature in the house, which screens the sun-burner and tempers its effulgence.

Above this perforated dome there are large skylights which open to the cool night; so that in warm and fine weather the Frivolity may be made almost an open-air theatre.

The one private box which is not well filled is the stage-box on the left of the proscenium. Here sits a gentleman in solitary state—a gentleman of about five-and-thirty—in faultless evening dress. His hair, moustache, and whiskers are of that nondescript colour which it would be flattery to call brown, mockery to describe as auburn; they are of the hue of a well-preserved hayrick, but are made the most of by the barber's art, and are evidently not unvalued by their owner. The general expression of the gentleman's face is weary to vacuousness. His dull gray eye surveys the house, but no warmth is communicated to it by the enthusiasm evident in that expectant crowd.

'There's Earlswood in that stage-box,' says Jack Pollintory of the *Highflyer* to Dick Savage of the *Chameleon*; 'wonder how he feels now that the builder's bill has come in?'

'Pshaw! a howling swell like that thinks no

more of paying for a theatre than you would of settling for a Greenwich dinner. He has more coal-mines than I have boots.'

Opera-glasses are directed to the solitary gentleman by this time. It is generally known that he is Lord Earlswood, and it is known to the esoteric few that Lord Earlswood's money is to pay for the building of the Frivolity. Of course Mrs. Brandreth has taken the theatre in good faith, and will pay her rent, two thousand five hundred per annum, as punctually as quarter-day comes round, and will stand or fall by her venture; but it is known that the actual erection of the theatre is Lord Earlswood's affair. The straw-coloured quilted satin; the amethyst velvet cushions, chair covers, curtains; the medallion portraits of Juliet, Cordelia, Desdemona, Rosalind, Perdita, Beatrice, Katherine, painted by Academicians; the crystal girandoles with clusters of parian candles, in which a slender gastube is artfully inserted; the cloak-rooms, with their luxurious appliances; the smoking divan, opening upon a wide stone balcony, overhanging the street, where the smokers may

sit on warm nights—these, and a hundred other details, Lord Earlswood must pay for; and the British public uses its lorgnettes freely, and regards him with a kind of interest, on account of his risk; just as on the turf the same public is interested in the man who is known to speculate deeply.

There has been an airy trifle in the way of burletta to play the audience in—pretty girls with fresh young voices, well-dressed well-bred young men, and sparkling French music; but now the serious interest, the vital business of the night, is to begin with Herman's comedy.

Hemlock, a classical comedy, suggested by Emile Augier. 'Suggested is a good word,' says Mr. Skalper, in the stalls, to his friend Mr. Phlayer. 'Of course we know what it is, *La Ciguë* done into modern slang.'

Behind the scenes the excitement is feverous, breathless, but not noisy; sound and fury are not to be allowed in Myra Brandreth's theatre. The scene-painter soothes his ruffled nerves with a cigar, in the dim solitude of his painting-room in the flies, and wonders whether those Pompeian scenes which he

has laboured at with so much care will hit that uncertain mark—the public taste. In the wardrobe, a bare and uninviting apartment, also in the region of the flies, and opening upon the gutter and parapet of the building, Mrs. Lockstitch, the costume-maker, and her pale-faced minions are sewing the last bit of gold lace on the last of the ballet-dresses, while the damsel who is to wear that classic garment waits anxiously in the dressing-room below, scantily clad in tight-fitting pink hose, and solacing herself with half-a-pint of porter and a ham-sandwich. This opening night of the theatre is an occasion on which even an honest little ballet-girl, living on her own salary and helping mother to live withal, may rush into the extravagance of an 'am-sandwich.

But excitement the most intense, because the most suppressed, reigns in Myra Brandreth's dressing-room, that exquisite apartment which focuses in one small centre the costliness and taste of the whole building. Lord Earlswood has said to the architect, 'Let the manageress's dressing-room be as perfect as art can make it. Simply that; anything less than that, and I shall consider the house a failure.'

The architect has obeyed according to his lights. Pompadour, in the plenitude of her power, with France at her feet, acknowledged protectress of the arts, may have had rooms as elegant, but not more elegant or more costly. Walls upholstered in sky-blue satin embroidered with butterflies and birds—birds and butterflies so artistic that they seem living creatures fluttering in a tropical sky; doors veneered with ivory, mantelpiece of Sèvres, ceiling painted with more birds and butterflies, chairs and couches of white enamelled wood and quilted blue satin, toilet-table, the crowning wonder of all, entirely of ivory and silver. There is not an inch of velvet or gilding in the room. All is cool, soft, reposeful. After the brightness and glitter of the theatre, the eye rests here as on a glimpse of dark-blue water.

Myra Brandreth stands before the cheval-glass, dressed for her part. The long straight robe of white cashmere, like Vivien's sea-green samite, rather expresses than hides her slender figure; each round slim arm is clasped with a golden serpent, and a golden serpent binds her chestnut hair. These are her sole ornaments.

In an easy-chair by the fireplace sits Herman Westray, who has just been admitted to an audience, being altogether a privileged person this evening. He sees the room to-night for the first time, and has been warm in his commendation.

'The Queen of Sheba could have had nothing better,' he says.

Mrs. Brandreth shrugs her slim shoulders with a deprecating air.

'How much more useful the money this room cost would have been in Consols!' she replies.

'No doubt; but a man of Earlswood's stamp likes spending money, not giving it away. This room will be talked about by the clubs. A few thousands invested in your name would bring him no renown, though the gift of such a sum might be only an appropriate tribute to your genius.'

Myra's dark eyes flash upon him angrily for a moment, and then grow grave even to gloom.

'I suppose *I* shall be talked of at the clubs as well as the theatre,' she says moodily, looking down, as she arranges the folds of her cashmere drapery.

'That goes without saying. You did not expect

to escape when you allowed Earlswood to build a theatre for you ?

‘Lord Earlswood built this house as a speculation.’

‘No doubt—as a speculation.’

‘It was not my fault that he squandered thousands upon this foolish room. I told him that all I wanted was space and ventilation, and to be tolerably near the stage. I must do him the justice to say that his answer was that of a gentleman. “You are to pay me rent for the theatre,” he said. “That is a matter of business, and I shall gladly accept any suggestions you may make; but your dressing-room is to be a present from me to you, and you must allow me to gratify my own taste.”’

‘Very nice of his lordship. The dressing-room is a capital advertisement for the theatre. I don’t think you need grumble about it. And now, honestly, do you feel that you are going to make a success?’

‘I feel as if I were going to break down. My head is burning, and my hands are like ice.’

She gives him her small thin hand, stone cold and trembling.

‘You’ll do,’ he answers decisively. ‘The piece will be a hit.’

He knows that with her highly-strung nature she is sure to be greatest when she suffers most.

‘Keep yourself quiet,’ he says kindly. ‘I shall go round to the stalls, and not stir till the curtain drops. I have not the faintest fear of the result.’

‘Say one kind word to me, Herman, before you go,’ she pleads, with tenderest saddest beseechment in her tones.

He comes to her slowly, takes the small smoothly-braided head between his hands, and kisses her forehead. So might brother or father have kissed her in some solemn crisis of her life. He is so utterly an artist that this hazard of success or non-success to-night seems to him a solemn crisis.

‘God bless you, Myra! Be sure of triumph; I see the forecast of it shining in your eyes. Let my play succeed, and Earlswood’s speculation—fail.’

That earnest look of his, straight into the bright dark eyes, explains the hidden significance of his speech. When he is gone, Myra Brandreth looks

round the room with a slow deliberate survey, scornful almost to loathing.

‘Does he think I am to be bought with ivory and Sèvres?’ she asks.

CHAPTER VI.

‘Hélas! l’amour sans lendemain ni veille
Fut-il jamais?’

HERMAN is in his place just in time to see the curtain rise on a scene as perfect as any which our realistic and artistic modern stage has ever offered to the public. It is an interior in Pompeii, elaborate, exquisite in its details as a picture by Alma Tadema. The foreground represents the triclinium, or dining-room, divided by marble columns from the peristyle, where a silvery spray flies upward amidst the gloom of oleander and olive. Through the open roof of that inner court shines the calm summer moon. Three men, reclining on their narrow couches around a central table laden with fruits and flowers and tapering wine flasks, occupy the stage, one young, with curled locks, crowned with a rose-garland. Slaves are in attendance; flute-players, dancing-girls fill the background; but as the scene progresses these

melt away. Leander, a rich young patrician, being weary of life and its beaten round of pleasures, has determined to make a sudden end of a brief bright existence with a draught of hemlock. He announces his resolution to his two parasites, middle-aged profligates, who have been the instruments of his corruption. He frankly expresses his contempt for both these sycophants, one a drunkard the other a miser, but tells them that he is going to leave his wealth to one or other of them, upon a certain condition. He has just purchased a lovely slave from Cyprus, and his fortune shall be bestowed upon that one of his flatterers whom the fair captive favours with her preference.

The two friends are by no means charmed by the idea of this encounter; but Leander tells them that, having no real friendship for one or the other, he saves himself the embarrassment of choosing his heir by letting some one else make the election. The friends at first indignantly decline the contest, assume a noble scorn, and forego all hope of Leander's wealth rather than stoop to sue for a girl's favour, which both feel doubtful of conciliating; but being

left to themselves, prudence comes to the rescue, and they determine to hazard the trial, each entertaining the lowest estimate of the other's merits. Leander returns, and hears that their honourable scruples have evaporated.

And now the slave appears in her white robes, with the golden serpents on her wrists, pale, beautiful, with those great dark eyes of hers, which flash swiftly round the house in one brief survey of the audience. She is a captive, ravished by a crew of pirates from the bright shore where she wandered gaily a little while ago; a maiden of noble birth, reft from home and kindred. It scarcely needs that she should tell this, in a brief impassioned speech, to her new lord, Myra Brandreth's look and bearing being so entirely noble. Leander is touched by her beauty and sorrow, receives her gently, tenderly even, assures her that no wrong shall be done her. He beseeches her, in order to decide a wager, to declare which of his two friends shall have rendered himself the most agreeable to her in an hour's conversation.

Then follows a scene in which the two sycophants display the graces of their mind in delicate flatteries

addressed to Helena the slave ; but presently, losing temper in the keen sense of rivalry and the magnitude of the stake, fall foul of each other in a round of abuse, and end by fisticuffs. Helena rushes out to seek some one to part them, and Leander appears while they are fighting, and laughs with cynical delight at the realisation of his intention. His heritage has made them foes already. He has the pleasure of seeing the vultures fighting for his carcass before his death.

From this point Herman's piece diverges from Augier's graceful comedy. Leander, who professes to have proved the hollowness of life and the worthlessness of love, to be weary to satiety of pleasure and beauty, is touched by Helena's modest loveliness and noble mind ; and before he is aware, his heart is taken captive by his prisoner. Herman makes the love-scenes more important than they are in the original ; he strengthens the character of Helena, deepens the sentimental interest to intensity. At the last, when the appointed hour strikes, and the fatal cup is at Leander's lips, the passionate cry, 'I love you !' breaks from the slave. The audience is moved as

with one mind, and a burst of enthusiastic applause proclaims the triumph of actress and author.

Herman has rendered Augier's gracious rhyme into blank verse: vigorous, fanciful, poetical, full of repartee and sudden turns of thought; modern allusions thinly veiled by their classic dress, keen touches of irony that charm an enlightened audience. The curtain falls amidst a storm of applause. The pit, always foremost in the appreciation of an intellectual treat, rises in its enthusiasm as Frederick Selwyn, the Leander, leads Myra Brandreth before the curtain. Bouquets shoot, rocket-like, through the air, whence none can discover, but seemingly from the latticed gallery that runs round the upper circle. After the actors and scene-painter have been called, some friendly soul remembers the author, and Mr. Westray is loudly demanded. Herman goes round to Lord Earlswood's box, whence he honours the British public with a languid and somewhat supercilious bow.

'Do you think it's a success?' asks his lordship, with the air of a man who rarely trusts himself to arrive at an opinion single-handed.

‘They’re making a good deal of noise,’ answers Herman languidly—he is always languid with Lord Earlswood—‘but that’s apt to be fallacious. I believe, as a rule, the pieces that seem doubtful on first nights pay best in the long-run.’

‘Brandreth was magnificent,’ says the landlord of the Frivolity. ‘I daresay the play is very clever from a literary standpoint, but, as a matter of personal taste, I should have preferred *opéra bouffe*, or a modern drama, with Brandreth poisoning herself in a riding-habit, and rolling about the floor. I saw that done somewhere last year, and it took immensely. However, she was great in your last scene.’

‘Mrs. Brandreth’s acting was simply superb throughout,’ replies Herman, with a tone of respect so pointed as to be a reproof. Lord Earlswood is, however, not accessible to such delicate correction.

‘Yes,’ he draws, ‘Brandreth is a first-rate all-round actress; but I think this piece of yours shoots over the heads of your audience. One’s obliged to keep one’s mind on the stretch in order to understand it.’

‘That depends upon the size of one’s mind,’ an-

swers Herman coolly; 'small minds naturally require stretching.'

'Haw!' exclaims his lordship, with a laugh like a single knock—loud, startling, monosyllabic; 'that's not bad. Shall we go round and see Brandreth?'

'Certainly. I must lose no time in acknowledging my obligations to her.'

There is a neat little green-baize door just outside Lord Earlswood's box, which opens on to the prompt side of the stage. His lordship made this door an essential feature in the architect's plan, and stipulated for a private key of the same, and the box adjacent thereto, before he signed the lease which has made Mrs. Brandreth actual mistress of the theatre. He uses his key to-night with a sidelong glance of triumph at Herman; but although Herman has been admitted to the manageress's dressing-room, Lord Earlswood dare go no farther than the greenroom.

It is a pretty little room, with a large looking-glass reaching from floor to ceiling at one end, in which the actors and actresses may survey their toilettes and themselves. A low chintz-covered divan runs round the rest of the room; lithographed por-

traits of French and English actors adorn the walls ; a majolica jardinière in the centre is filled with Mrs. Brandreth's bouquets—floral tributes, which she has left there in disdainful carelessness.

A door opens from the greenroom to the manageress's dressing-room, and the greenroom is within a step or two of the prompt entrance. The rest of the performers are accommodated in upper chambers, on a level with the gallery, and agreeably warmed by the heated air ascending from the lower part of the house.

‘Never mind ; perhaps when we go to heaven we shall all be manageress, and have ivory toilette-tables,’ says Bella Walters, the little burlesque actress, as she stands before her two-and-sixpenny looking-glass, dabbing a final coat of prepared chalk upon her pert little nose, while old Mrs. Humpsby, the dresser, grins approvingly.

Mrs. Brandreth is dressing ; so the two gentleman wait, and stare at the people dressed for the burlesque, who run in to scrutinise their new costumes in the big mirror : girl cavaliers in satin trunks and satin boots, low comedians with false

noses of cotton-wool, mythological, fairylandish, and so on.

‘What a lot of people!’ cries Lord Earlswood.
‘I’m afraid it’s an expensive company.’

‘I shouldn’t wonder if it were,’ answers Herman dryly.

It seems to him that this theatre is the most costly toy that ever a man made for himself. It has cost Myra Brandreth her reputation already, and has associated her name with Lord Earlswood’s to the end of time, or at least to the end of the time we live in, which is pretty much the same thing. When a man has been dead as long as Homer, it must be of small consequence what the world thinks of him.

The two gentlemen wait for a time that seems long to both; but at last the door opens, and Mrs. Brandreth appears in a dark-green cloth dress, made as neatly and as plainly as a riding-habit, and with a sealskin jacket hanging across her arm. A small sealskin hat crowns her dark hair; not a feather, not an ornament is visible. She wears a linen collar, linen cuffs, gloves the colour of her dress. Mrs.

Brandreth has too much taste to trail elaborately-trimmed silks or velvets about the side-scenes of a theatre.

‘That’s a capital cross-country get-up, Mrs. Brandreth,’ says Lord Earlswood approvingly. ‘Allow me to congratulate you on your performance. It must have surprised your greatest admirers.’

‘Thanks. I’m glad you were pleased,’ with the briefest glance and smile; and then, turning to Herman, she asks earnestly, ‘Were you satisfied?’

‘You have made my piece,’ he answers warmly.

‘I never acted in a play of yours before—think of that!’

‘And I never had a character of mine so interpreted. You breathed a soul into my mould of clay.’

She gives him a look which glorifies her pale face—very pale after the excitement of the evening—a look which arouses as much jealousy in Lord Earlswood as that gentleman’s limited capacity for passion or suffering will allow. He is of a somewhat lukewarm temperament by nature, cooled down

almost to freezing-point by education. But he thinks it would be a rather nice thing for Myra Brandreth to be something more to him than a popular actress, and he pursues her with as much energy as he is capable of infusing into any action of his life. This building a theatre for her has been the gratification of his last fancy, and has served to occupy that scantily-furnished chamber which he calls his mind. He has a great deal of money, and finds his chief enjoyment in getting rid of it. He has built yachts and kept racehorses—and the only novel amusement left for him has been to build a theatre.

There is a good deal said about the play and the house, the effect of the decorations with a full auditorium, and Mr. Pipp the architect is praised for his perforated Moorish dome.

‘Makes the theatre look like a parrot-cage,’ says Lord Earlswood, who imitates Horace in his incapacity for admiration, ‘but it’s rather a nice idea, I daresay. Jokes—fellow who wrote about the house in the *Builder*—said it was good, and a builder-fellow ought to understand that kind of thing.’

‘We shall call a rehearsal for twelve o’clock on

Monday,' Mrs. Brandreth says, turning to Herman.
'If there is any alteration you would like—'

'There is none; or at least none that would touch your part. Your acting was simply perfect, and the other characters were very good. I think we might apply the pruning-knife judiciously to some of the dialogue—when you are off the stage.'

'You will come on Monday, then?'

'Certainly.'

'Good-night, Lord Earlswood,' says his lordship's tenant, with a certain careless graciousness not altogether flattering to Algernon, Baron Earlswood.

'Going away so soon?' he exclaims.

'It is nearly eleven, and I am rather tired.
Good-night, Mr. Westray.'

She shakes hands with both gentlemen languidly, and both accompany her to her carriage, which is waiting at the stage-door. It is the neatest and quietest of broughams, the coachman middle-aged, puritanical in the simplicity of his dark-blue overcoat.

'If you could call on me to-morrow,' says Mrs.

Brandreth, as an afterthought, 'we might go through the piece together and make what alterations you like in the dialogue. It would save time at Monday's rehearsal.'

'No doubt; but I regret to say Sunday is a busy day with me just now. I shall be occupied all to-morrow.'

'What would your dear father have said if he had heard of your working on a Sunday?' remarks Mrs. Brandreth reproachfully.

'Unhappily the world I belong to just now is very different from my father's world.'

'Just now! That sounds as if you had some notion of withdrawing from your present life and its surroundings.'

'I confess to a vague hope of being some day something better than an ephemeral scribbler, with a demoniacal printer's boy always haunting me as affectionately as the Bottle-imp. Good-night.'

'Good-night.'

And so they part, and Myra Brandreth sinks wearily into a corner of the snug little brougham, and thinks that, notwithstanding her dainty bonbon-

box of a theatre, with a landlord ready to be ridiculously lenient as a creditor, despite her triumph of to-night, it is a hard world somehow.

There is one man whose good word she values—whose praise brings maidenly blushes to her matron cheek; for whose honest unalterable love she would barter all she has ever won of prosperity or renown—all praises that have ever been given her by all the world beside—and she thinks drearily to-night that of all hopeless dreams that ever woman dreamed, her dream of winning his heart is the vainest.

‘It was mine once,’ she tells herself; ‘that’s what makes it so hard to know it can never be mine again. Mine to hold or throw away when he was younger and better than he is now, but obscure and unpraised; lost to me now that all the world praises him—now, when I could be so proud of him, work for him so honestly, cleave to him so faithfully through every change of fortune, love him best of all when the world grew weary of him, and fame went out like the flame of a candle.’

As in a picture she sees one bright moment of her past: a green lane in summer time; the sultry

breathless heat of late summer ; a steep grassy bank on which the harts-tongue grows tall ; and two figures, her own and Herman's, standing with hand clasped in hand, her head upon his shoulder, her eyes looking up at him proudly, fondly as a girl's eyes turn to her first lover ; but that picture is nearly ten years old, and Myra Brandeth's thoughts and feelings have gone through many a change within the compass of those years.

'How bitterly true French proverbs are!' she thinks. '*On revient toujours*—And I am as weak as the rest, and lament the treasure I cast away, and have changed my standard of value, and that which I counted gold now loathe as basest dross.'

CHAPTER VII.

‘And now the time is winterly,
The first love fades too; none will see,
When April warms the world anew,
The place wherein love grew.’

TEN years ago—earth younger and fresher by ten years; so much the more of blossoming wilderness in the southern hemisphere where the emigrant and the squatter has yet to set the print of his civilising sole; so many the more fair and pleasant places in fair and pleasant England which the speculative builder, with his dust and his bricks and his lime and mortar, has yet to disfigure. The world brighter and younger by a decade. Great men still living who now are dust; dear names still sounding in the current talk of life which are now written in epitaphs and remembered as household words; and Myra Clitheroe is a tall slip of a girl, just over her seventeenth birthday—birthday at which there has been an innocent little tea-drinking in Colonel Clitheroe’s

cottage, whereto the young people from the Rectory have been bidden.

Colonel Clitheroe is one of those adventurous spirits who, in the decline of their days, are apt to seek the repose of remote and tranquil villages, where the requirements of life are narrowed by the simple manners of the inhabitants, where beef and mutton, and milk and butter, and eggs and poultry are cheap, and house-rent low, and air purest ether, and sky unstained by the smoke of factory chimneys, and the village a quaint little cluster of low-roofed cottages embowered in greenery, and pigs, pigeons, and fowls in full possession of the High-street, and the post-office and general-shop an institution to be wondered at, so comprehensive and universal are its contents.

The Colonel is a man who has seen much of life. He has fought for Don Carlos, and derives his military title from his service in Spain. He has lived in Paris, Madrid, and London ; has spent some portion of his days in South America, and is not unremembered in Mexico. But at sixty-seven years of age he has had enough of a nomad existence. It is pleasant to remember his wanderings and relate his

adventures while he reposes at ease by his well-warmed hearth; pleasanter still to have a graceful quick-witted daughter always at hand to minister to his numerous little wants, plan his dinners, nay, even fry an omelette, or make a dish of macaroni with parmesan, on occasions; a bright clever girl, who makes a sovereign go as far as two dispensed by a duller housekeeper. His cottage at Colehaven is the pink of prettiness, very small, but seeming so much the snugger for its smallness, daintily furnished with the relics of larger and more splendid abodes, picked up as occasion serves at sales, but always appropriate, and each object suiting its particular corner as perfectly as if it had been made to order for that very spot. This general fitness of things may in some measure be explained by the fact, that Colonel and Miss Clitheroe have devoted as much forethought to, and taken as much pains about, the purchase of second-hand what-not, work-table, or easy-chair, as people of larger means bestow upon the acquirement of a landed estate. The little old-fashioned cottage, with its thatched roof and pigeon-hole windows, is full of odd corners and unexpected

angles, and in every corner there is something bright and pretty to strike the stranger's eye. A triangular satinwood cabinet, with trays of Indian shells; a quaint little bookcase with a few chosen volumes; an old German oak commode surmounted by a blue delf jar. Myra is one of those active spirits who rise with the larks, and she gives her mornings to household duties, and flits about, light of foot, with gloved hands and broad linen apron, duster, and dusting-brush; while Sarah, the maid-of-all-work, is broiling the Colonel's rasher and frying chopped potatoes for a simple Devonshire breakfast.

Colonel Clitheroë, though a soldier of fortune, has been ever an honest man. It is his boast that he has lived among spendthrifts and social Bohemians, and yet paid his way; that no tailor remembers him with a pang; that no time-yellowed page in a fashionable bootmaker's ledger records his dishonour.

In his Devonian retirement he amuses himself with literature, contributes, in his small way, to the magazines, and widens his narrow income somewhat by these means. But the pride which he takes in his literary achievements is worth far more to him

than the remuneration. At Colehaven he is looked up to as one of the authors of the day. A Colehaven person suddenly launched into London society would be infinitely surprised to find the name of Clitheroe unhonoured and unknown. At Colehaven, Colonel Clitheroe occupies the same platform as Sydney Smith and Theodore Hook once adorned in the wider world of cities. People exhibit him at their dinners as a flourishing specimen of the literary lion; his dictum upon literature, and even upon art as a half-sister to literature, is accepted as law; his latest intelligence of the world of letters heard with avidity. In act, trading upon the smallest of capitals, Colonel Clitheroe finds himself a great man at Colehaven, and discovers that life in this remote village, with its outlying country houses, more or less hospitably inclined, is better than life in Paris or London.

His only daughter Myra is not quite so well satisfied with her surroundings at Colehaven. She has lived there nearly ten years, has grown from childhood to womanhood in that narrow little world, and she has dim recollections of London and Paris, which are like a dream of the *Arabian Nights*. She

was taken to a theatre once—a century ago it seems to her—and she can to this day recall the glitter and glory of the scene, the music, the lamp-light, the people—more people massed in one shining circle than have been in Colehaven since the creation, she imagines. She looks back regretfully to her city life as if it were all represented by that one night at the theatre, and she asks her father wonderingly how he can exist in this dull old village after his experience of brighter worlds.'

'My love, if I could transfer this little box with all its appurtenances to the best part of Kensington, live as cheaply there as I do here, and be as big a man there as I am here, I would transfer myself to Kensington to-morrow; but as London or Paris for you and me would mean a shabby lodging in a third-rate neighbourhood, butcher's meat at a shilling a pound, no cream or fresh eggs, and no county families to ask us to dinner—'

'Us,' echoes Myra fretfully. 'Who asks me?'

'My love, you are not yet of an age to be invited to dinner-parties. All that will come in due course. With your beauty and accomplish-

ments how can you fail to be invited out and made much of ?'

Myra sighs and smiles, and kisses that dear foolish papa, who has such a pleasant way of saying things. She knows that, with even less opportunities, she is more accomplished than most of the girls of her acquaintance ; sings better, plays more brilliantly, has a more general capacity for learning new things, a greater deftness of finger, a surer eye at archery, a more exact aim at croquet, superior taste in the trimming of a dress, the adjustment of a ribbon, more skill in the art of making much out of little. There are the rectory girls, for instance, Georgina and Caroline, Herman's sisters, how dowdily they contrive to dress ; how dull and dark and heavy the rectory drawing-room looks under their industrious hands ; how monotonous their garden, with the same flowers blooming in it year after year ! True that Georgie and Carrie visit a great deal among the poor, and work their fingers almost to the bone at Dorcas meetings, while Myra does neither ; her papa insisting upon having her always about him, as she

explains to her rectory friends plaintively. But in honest truth Myra would rather fry an omelette, or make a cup of chocolate, or grate parmesan for a dish of macaroni, than sit by sick-beds in stuffy cottages reading the Bible, or sew coarse common garments with her delicate little fingers.

Her father is foolishly fond, perilously indulgent; praises his girl's pretty looks, her sweet voice, graceful winning ways, her cleverness, and general good management. She lives in an atmosphere of praise; rises every morning to be admired, lies down at night pleased with her own beauty and sweetness. The one servant is a faithful soul, who has lived with Colonel Clitheroe ever since he came to Colehaven, and she simply worships Myra, wondering at her as at some beauteous hothouse flower which has expanded and blossomed under her eyes.

The people of the Rectory, the Colonel's nearest and kindest neighbours, are almost as fond of Myra as if she were of their own flesh and blood. Many a summer afternoon she spends in the big old-fashioned garden, with its unvarying round of old-

fashioned flowers : flags and columbines, and larkspurs and lupins, polyanthuses, tiger-lilies, stocks, and sweet-williams ; many a winter's night in the cheerful drawing-room, or playing bagatelle or acting charades in the large comfortable low-ceiled chamber which is still called the children's parlour.

Myra has introduced charades into the rectory household. This slip of a girl, who can remember but one night at a theatre, has a veritable passion for dramatic art. Before she entered her teens she had learned every word of Juliet, Queen Katherine, Constance, Lady Macbeth, Cordelia, Rosalind, and Beatrice, and she has spouted the passionate speeches to her father in the winter gloaming, while the Colonel smoked the pipe of placid idleness by his cheery fire, and taught by that loving father the girl has grown into a superb elocutionist. No shrill girlish treble, but the rich round tones of a cultivated organ swell from that column-like throat of hers. The Colonel has been an enthusiastic lover of the stage, and knows that Shakespearean round by heart, almost as well as his daughter. He is at his best as a dramatic critic. He teaches Myra

how the O'Neill used to pause here, or linger fondly on a word there, or rise at such a point to indignant passion. He remembers Sarah Siddons' awful whisper as that noble form brooded over the pit, appalling in its majestic beauty, while those dark intense eyes of hers seemed to pierce the gloom of the theatre, seeking the spirits of evil her solemn whisper invoked. He recalls Mrs. Jordan, with her joy-inspiring laugh, her free grace, her self-abandonment; and Myra hangs on his words with unvarying delight, and asks him again and again to describe that wondrous art which seems to have faded into a tradition.

Myra, being now seventeen, exhibits her dramatic powers in the children's parlour at the Rectory before select audiences of from four to six. The Rector, like all good Conservatives, is an idolater of Shakespeare.

'If I were shut up in prison as long as John Bunyan, I would ask for but two books,' he says; 'my Bible and my Shakespeare.'

'What, George, not your fine edition of Jeremy Taylor in fifteen volumes?' cries his wife, knowing

how many a small deprivation the Rector has endured in order to purchase the handsome calf-bound copy of his favourite divine.

‘If I had to put Shakespeare and Taylor in the scale, my love, honest Jeremy would kick the beam, great and eloquent as he is. And I’ll wager that I should find as good and true a system of morals pithily expressed in my Shakespeare as that laid down far more ornately and somewhat verbosely by my amiable Jeremy. Odd, by the bye, that the great divine, whilst constantly illustrating his arguments with quotations from the Greeks and Romans, hardly ever quotes the English playwright—a sure proof, one would say, that Shakespeare was little read, even by the erudite, in Taylor’s time.’

The Rector therefore, being a staunch Shakespearean, is delighted with Myra’s elocutionary displays, so soon as the girl can be persuaded to recite in his hearing. Her rendering of Constance’s speeches he pronounces magnificent, her sleeping scene from *Macbeth* marvellous.

Indeed, as she stood up before them all in the children’s parlour, open-eyed yet seeing not, pale

with deepest feeling, her low rich voice hushed to a solemn whisper, her speech broken, fitful, like the faint half-stifled murmuring of a guilty soul tossed on sleep's stormy sea, he must have been a capacious critic who denied her power, or doubted that there was here the highest capacity for dramatic greatness.

As for Herman—impulsive, thoughtless, and but just turned twenty—he absolutely bows down and worships her.

‘I only wish you knew Greek,’ he cries ecstatically, after one of her performances—the charades have been put aside by this time as childish and trivial, and they get up little scenes from Shakespeare instead of those extemporised performances—‘I’d teach you Clytemnestra—in Æschylus, you know. That full round voice of yours would be magnificent in Greek verse.’

And thereon the youthful Oxonian rolls out the description of the beacon fires that greeted the return of Agamemnon, opening his mouth very wide.

‘What a lot of “koi” and “oi” there is in it!’

cries Myra, laughing. 'What a pity Æschylus didn't write in English!'

Myra, just at this time, though three years younger than Herman, has an air of being his senior by ever so much. She has been a woman ever since she was twelve; has been purse-bearer and general manager in the dainty cottage; has been allowed to know all the ins and outs of her father's affairs, which, in their small way, are somewhat intricate. She is a woman in the full consciousness of her beauty and her powers, and she is a woman in ambitious longing for renown.

How many a time, sitting on the hearthrug at her father's slippered feet in the friendly gloaming—that gentle half-light in which people let slip their innermost thoughts and desires more freely than in the glare of day or gas—she has exclaimed, 'Papa, I mean to be famous!'

'My love, you have talents and good looks to make you distinguished anywhere; but—'

'Don't say "but," papa; there must be no buts. Do you remember somebody's epitaph, "Here lies one whose name was writ in water"? If I thought

that line would describe me when I am dead, I don't believe I could bear the burden of living. I don't long for money, as some people do. I haven't the faintest desire for horses and carriages, or a big house, or a regiment of servants, or even handsome dress, or rank, or station; but I want to be famous.'

'My pet, I have little doubt that you'll make a brilliant marriage by and by, when you are old enough to visit among the county people'—Myra being, at the time of this conversation, about fifteen and a half.

'What, and owe everything to my husband, like Lady Teazle!' cries the girl, pushing back a cloud of loose chestnut hair from her small decided face. 'No, papa, I mean never to marry; I mean to be famous. Papa'—coaxingly—'would you very much object to my going on the stage, like Mrs. Siddons?'

'Myra!' exclaims the outraged father, 'do you happen to remember my family?'

The Colonel is an offshoot of a noble family tree. He belongs to a clan whose chieftain is a

certain Lord Perranzabuloe—a fetish to whom all the clan bow themselves down with slavish worship, though he has never been known to confer the smallest benefit upon any one of them, being a little old man who lives obscurely and unsocially in a suburban villa, like an irreligious recluse, drinks himself to the verge of delirium tremens, and suffers the dominion of an Italian opera-dancer. Yet the clan refer to him none the less proudly, and rarely utter half a dozen sentences at any social gathering without some happy allusion to ‘my cousin Lord Perranzabuloe,’ who seems to pervade their lives in some mysterious manner, although ostensibly ignoring them.

To Myra’s mortal eye, her father’s family has been as invisible as Mrs. Micawber’s relations; but to her mind’s eye they have frequently presented themselves, the Colonel reverting to them in all discussions as awful powers to be praised and propitiated, like the Greek Eumenides, and, like them, beings of malignant tendencies.

‘What would my family say if a daughter of mine were to become an actress?’ ejaculates Colonel

Clitheroe. 'Conceive the feelings of Lord Perranzabuloe!'

'But, papa, as you say he's generally tipsy, his feelings must be a little blunted by this time,' remarks Myra. 'And as for our relations, I dare say, in a general way they are very grand, and it's rather nice to see their names in the papers occasionally; but as they have never condescended to seem aware of my existence, I cannot understand why they need feel injured by my going on the stage. Besides, I could change my name.'

'Change it as you might, the fact would leak out. The world would discover that Colonel Clitheroe's daughter was on the stage.'

A year and a half later Myra is seventeen, and the same subject is again discussed as father and daughter sit by their homely hearth, the ruddy fire-light shining on the girl's eager face, and sparkling in her dark hazel eyes.

'Papa, was Mrs. Siddons a very wicked woman?'

'My dear, what can suggest such a question? Mrs. Siddons was the pink of propriety. She was

received at Frogmore, and read Shakespeare to the Queen and princesses.'

'And Miss O'Neill, was she wicked?'

'Miss O'Neill was as much distinguished for her virtue as for her genius. She married into the baronetage. You may see her name in Burke.'

'Then why do you object to my going on the stage, papa? Why do you say Lord Perranza-buloe would be outraged, and all our family indignant?'

'Because the stage is not well thought of as a profession, my love.'

'But why not, papa?'

The Colonel twirls his gray moustache, at a loss for a reply.

'Well—my dear—you see—there have been disreputable people on the stage.'

'But there have been disreputable painters, papa. That poor Morland, for instance, whom you were talking about the other day, who drank so, and used to paint with a glass of brandy-and-water in his left hand, and sent some pigs to the pawnbroker's before they were dry, so that the pawn-

broker rubbed out one little pig accidentally with his thumb. Yet nobody calls painting a disreputable profession. And there have been wicked people who wrote books ; wicked lawyers, even great judges ; and sometimes even a wicked clergyman. Why should people look down upon the stage as a profession ?'

Again the Colonel twirls his moustache, and knows not how to answer this eager disputant.

Meanwhile the girl's love of dramatic art grows with her power of expression. Her taste, her untutored talents astonish every one. With a few old shawls and scarves and worthless odds and ends she can attire herself with a wondrous grace and picturesqueness. Her rapid changes of costume are like sleight-of-hand. The charm and variety of her elocution, the beauty of her voice, the vivacity and expression which constitute the chief attraction of her small finely-cut face, are admired by every member of her narrow circle, but by none so ardently as by Herman Westray. There is just enough, in her unlikeness to all other women, to catch the fancy of a young man ; and before that

last Long Vacation is over, Herman is deeply in love, with the one only true, absorbing, unchanging, eternal passion which attacks a youth of twenty as ferociously as whooping-cough lays its iron grip upon tender infancy.

So in that shady lane which Mrs. Brandreth so vividly remembers, Herman tells Colonel Clitheroe's daughter his love; and she responds, sobbing, that she means to be single all her life, and famous—solitary and miserable, perhaps, like a female Childe Harold, but at any price famous. And then, wooed persistently, a fond arm encircling her, dark-blue eyes looking down into hers, words coming swiftly—words that seem eloquent as noblest verse—the girl is won to admit that if she could love any one, it would be Herman; if she could resign her hope of fame for any one, it would be for Herman; if she could consent to die inglorious, but live loving and beloved—if she could submit to have her name written in water—it would be for Herman; nay, at last, that she does love him—that she will forego all things for his sake—will be his for all time: so soon as he shall have taken orders, and that curacy

which is his present object and hope shall be obtained by him. Thus they leave the lane plighted lovers; and Myra, although deeply happy, resigns with a regretful sigh all thought of being as famous as Miss O'Neill.

Herman goes back to Oxford, and reads harder than ever; and just at this time a fever of strong opinion quickens the pulse of thought at that grave old university. Some take the fever one way, some another. Some tranquil souls escape the fiery blast unscathed. Some go over to Rome; some stop short at Ritualism. Some find their convictions overthrown like a rickety temple of frailest carpentry, and wander away, beyond the light of former guiding stars, into a howling wilderness of unbelief. Herman takes the infection badly, and joins these last. He discovers that his convictions are not earnest enough for the Church—that too much Aristotle has been the death of his spiritualism. He shrinks from announcing this change of feeling to the dear old father at home, or the fond faithful mother, or the pious sisters; but he writes a long and wild epistle to Myra, which she does not under-

stand in the least, and sends her Shelley, by way of pioneer of his new opinions, whom she comprehends even less.

Before this year is out the good-natured old Colonel dies suddenly of an apoplectic seizure—sad result of ten years' ease and high living—and a member of the invisible family comes forward to take possession of Myra: a female member, a military widow, with a strong moustache and a manner suggestive of cavalry—a lady who resides at Bath, in which city she is honoured and admired as Mrs. Major Pompion. Mrs. Major Pompion is the late Colonel's half-sister, and consequently Myra's aunt.

'Remember, my dear, I am a Clitheroe,' she says proudly. 'My father married twice. His first wife, your father's mother, was connected with trade—her people supplied ships with biscuits and ropes, and that kind of thing—wealthy but plebeian. My mother was a baronet's seventh daughter, and as poor as a church mouse. You see I am not afraid of putting things in plain English.'

Mrs. Pompion knows all the best people in Bath,

and under Mrs. Pompion's military escort Myra sees more society than would have been possible at Colehaven, were the county people never so friendly. Mrs. Major Pompion's circle is strong in the martial element, and by the time Myra has left off her mourning that young lady is better posted in military affairs than any other damsel in Bath. Her singing, her vivacity, her elocution—for she is prevailed upon to give a recitation at a small friendly party now and then—win her a host of admirers, and one day being deeply offended with Herman's neglect of her last letter—his father is dead by this time, and he is fighting the battle of life, heavily weighted—Myra Clitheroe listens to the impassioned pleading of a certain Captain Brandreth, who has pursued her for the last six months, and breaks her troth to Herman Westray. This Captain Brandreth—Charley Brandreth among his intimates—is good-looking, hare-brained, good-natured, extravagant—not rich in the present, but with large expectations, and heir-presumptive to a baronetcy.

Mrs. Major Pompion is delighted at this turn

of affairs. Mrs. Major Pompion is all over Bath in her hired landau next day announcing dear Myra's engagement. She has taken the girl out of kindly feeling, as well as family pride—it wouldn't do for a Clitheroe to go out in the world as a nursery governess, or serve in a shop—but she has never intended the girl to hang upon her for years, and here is a most eligible opportunity for planting the sweet child out in life.

So Myra is allowed no time to change her mind—no opportunity for drawing back; arrangements are made with wondrous promptness—preparations hurried on. She has hardly time to think.

'I shall give you your trousseau, my love, and it shall be worthy of a Clitheroe,' says Mrs. Major Pompion affectionately. 'If I should find myself crippled by and by in consequence of the outlay, you will be able to make it up to me when Charley comes into his property.'

The affianced Captain is 'Charley' already with Mrs. Major Pompion.

Charley is not actually disagreeable, and is desperately in love. He plunges into debt for presents

—gloves, bouquets, theatre and concert tickets. Myra's days and nights go by in a whirligig of small pleasures—and one morning she awakes to find it is her wedding-day.

She is honestly sorry for Herman—whom she remembers rather as the boy she played with years ago than as the young man who wooed her in the lane. She has written him a pretty little penitent letter, blaming herself very much and assuring him that she is not worthy his regret ; but to this letter there has been no reply.

So they are married, and Myra begins the wildest, gayest, and for a time perhaps, just while the novelty lasts, the happiest life she has ever known. She is the belle of the garrison, a queen in her small way. That histrionic genius of hers now comes into full play. She acts in drawing-room theatricals, and by and by Charley and his brother-officers go mad upon acting, and get up amateur performances in concert-rooms and theatres—for the benefit of some charitable institution or other—and the regiment loses its head generally, inspired—bewitched, the colonel says—by Mrs. Brandreth ; until one day

there is a muddle in the accounts after one of these amateur performances—out of ninety-seven pounds fourteen and sixpence gross returns only nine pounds fifteen being forthcoming for the Colour-Sergeants' Widows and Orphans Fund. The rent of the room is ten guineas, the gas two; the regimental band-master has received a *douceur* of five; printing has cost five more; hire of costumes another ten. There is an awful deficit somehow, which Charley, who is treasurer and acting-manager, finds himself powerless to explain, and it leaks out that the accounts of previous performances have been administered in a slipshod and unsatisfactory manner—whereupon Captain Brandreth is politely advised by his colonel that the wisest thing he can do is to sell his commission forthwith. He submits to the painful necessity, and he and Myra spend that autumn—the third of their wedded life—in furnished lodgings at Leamington.

Perhaps the disgrace breaks Charley's heart. Hard to be broken—put to open shame among his brother-officers—for a paltry fifty pounds, which has been muddled away somehow while he was carrying

the daily proceeds of the sale of tickets loose in his waistcoat-pockets, meaning to square up and make all things straight at a convenient opportunity. At any rate, he takes to drinking deeply and riding wildly, and between the two contrives to get his neck broken one misty November morning out with Lord Leigh's hounds, and thus make a sudden end of Myra's wedded life.

All the old brother-officers are kind to the poor lonely little widow—too kind, perhaps ; for Myra is too attractive to escape slander, and women friends she has none. Poor Charley has died before his expectations could become realities, and Mrs. Major Pompion feels that her niece has thrown away her chances, and severely reprobates Myra's dramatic follies as the primary cause of Charley's ruin and death. Nay, have there not been two children born to that frivolous young couple, one of whom would have been heir to Charley's expectations had death spared the frail sprig of humanity ? And even the untimely decease of these innocents Mrs. Major Pompion puts down to the account of Myra's infatuation for the drama.

‘Poor little neglected things!’ cries the lady to her gossips; ‘what chance could they have with a mother who thought more of acting Lady Gay Spanker than of nursing her babies? And those precious treasures heirs-presumptive to fifteen thousand a year!’

Retribution—fell, dire, and fully deserved—has fallen upon Myra Brandreth. That is the sentence of condemnation pronounced by the Vehmgericht of Bath.

Thus, deserted by her aunt and female friends, pitied and befriended by her husband’s intimates, Myra begins the world for the third time, under a cloud. And now the time has come for her to realise that old dream and desire of her childhood. She stands quite alone. The small estate she inherits from her husband would just serve to maintain her in obscurity; but Myra cannot submit to dwell for ever in obscurity. She goes to London, sees agents and managers, and of her own unaided energy procures an appearance as Juliet, on an off night, at a West-end theatre. She is successful enough to obtain an immediate offer of a leading

position from a provincial manager; and from that hour her progress is essentially rapid. A year later she is the principal comedy actress at a first-class London theatre, her talent an established fact, press and public alike on her side, her triumph complete. She has won the prize she pined for in her early girlhood—realised that vision she had so often seen in the winter gloaming, sitting at her father's feet, looking into the ruddy coals, and beholding a glorified picture of herself, radiant, resplendent, with a city at her feet.

The dear old father is gone—he who would so have rejoiced in her success—who would have been rejuvenated by her fame—the kind old father, whom she had fondly loved, after her impulsive inconsiderate fashion; and poor Charley too, whom she liked passably well. She is very lonely, and gladly receives flatteries and small attentions, for lack of love; and thus gives more license to Lord Earlswood's admiration than the world deems altogether wise. He has rarely spent a *tête-à-tête* half-hour in her society—so rarely that he can count the occasions, and treasures the memory of them—yet the

world couples their names, and pityingly murmurs, 'Poor Lady Earlswood, what has *she* done that she takes things so quietly?'

Soon after Myra's establishment as one of the stars of the dramatic hemisphere Herman Westray publishes that book by which he attains notoriety—half-sister to Fame—at a leap; and as his reputation grows, and the world praises him, and women shed tears over his pages, the popular actress looks back with a sigh to those unforgotten days when he was hers—lying at her feet in the late August noontides, in the misty September twilights—her slave, with nothing in the world to do

'but tend

Upon the hours and times of her desire.'

She has thought of him many a time in the careless years of her married life, when Charley's inanity has come home to her a little more sharply than usual—when the fact that she was wedded to a fool has jarred upon some sensitive chord in her nature. She has thought of him very often in her solitary widowhood, wondering whether he will ever come back to her—wondering why he does not come—

thinking him hard and unkind for withholding his notice and his praise, now that all the world notices and praises her.

She is among the first to read his books. O, how they speak to her of the days that are gone—of himself! He has laid his own heart upon the dissecting-table, and anatomised, vivisected its every pulse, its every throe. She knows now how utterly that heart was hers—how torn and wounded by her desertion—how embittered by her falsehood. She comes face to face with him once more, in those vivid pages, and the very breath of her youth comes back to her. She hears his passionate words. She is young and true and beloved again, ready to surrender all else that life can yield her for his dear sake. She reads, and the smouldering love flames up with a brighter, stronger fire than of old, and she knows that she loves her first lover still, and must so love him to the end of life.

One day, at a garden-party on the banks of the Thames—a party given by a popular comedian—an assembly at once artistic, literary, and dramatic—Herman and Myra meet again, so changed, both of

them, by seven years of severance; man of the world, woman of the world, accomplished in the polite art of self-repression both. She greets him with graceful tranquillity; he renews an old acquaintance with gracious candour. They talk of the dear dead fathers, the old home, to which neither would like to return, though they praise it so pathetically; and from that time the popular actress and the popular author are friends. Herman spends his Sunday afternoons in Myra's drawing-room in Bloomsbury—she has no grand pretensions, famous though she is—and the world begins to exclaim, 'Poor Lord Earlswood!'

But in three years of pleasant easy-going friendship, not one word of the old love has Herman ever spoken. His very friendliness is the most puissant armour against the shafts of love. And Myra knows that the passionate past is dead and buried, and fears no art of hers may ever charm it back to life again; yet would give half her life—yes, all the later elderly half of existence—for the power to make love young again, as Medea revived the youth of Æson.

CHAPTER VIII.

'I had died for this last year, to know
You loved me. Who shall turn on fate?
I care not if love come or go
Now, though your love seek mine for mate—
It is too late.

You loved me and you loved me not;
A little, much, and overmuch.
Will you forget as I forget?
Let all dead things lie dead; none such
Are soft to touch !'

THE winter season grows older. The Frivolity Theatre is a success. Lavish expenditure in the beautification of the house; a certain flavour of aristocracy which pertains to it on account of its patrician owner; Mrs. Brandreth's popularity; a well-chosen company, and a good play—have achieved the desired result. The Frivolity is the fashion. Its stalls are engaged a fortnight in advance; its private boxes are rarely given away, never empty. The best people go to the Frivolity, sure of not being outraged by anything vulgar in

dress or dialogue. Mrs. Brandreth's correct taste is a kind of warranty. Patronised by the aristocracy, and crowded nightly by the upper middle classes, the theatre pays, and pays well. Lord Earlswood has no occasion to be indulgent about his rent; Mrs. Brandreth's cheque reaches him, in the most formal manner, on quarter-day. Vainly he carries it back to her; vainly urges that, instead of wasting her profits on such an outside matter as rent, she should remove to some pretty house near the Parks, and set up her Victoria and brougham, instead of driving a hired vehicle, with a jog-trot gray horse very much in request at Bloomsbury weddings, and as well known at evening parties as the linkman.

Myra smiles at the suggestion.

'One swallow does not make a summer,' she replies, 'nor does one lucky season insure a permanent success. We may be playing to empty benches next year. Besides, these rooms serve my purpose well enough, and are larger than any I could get at the West-end at four times the rent I pay for these.'

His lordship glances round the apartment with

a depreciating eye, but is fain to own that it is 'not half a bad kind of room, after all.' It is an old-fashioned drawing-room in Bloomsbury-square, panelled, lofty, spacious. The furniture is ancient, like the room; ponderous, but so thoroughly in harmony with the room as to have a certain grace and beauty of its own. A hundred trifles of Myra Brandreth's arrangement and devising lend their charm to the heavy old chairs and tables; a carved Indian davenport, by Deschamps of Madras, stands open in one of the deeply-recessed windows; old china, old Venetian glass, from the cottage at Colehaven, light up the dim corners on this dusky afternoon with gleams of brightness and colour; book-stands, terra-cotta statuettes of opera singers, just imported from Paris, bronzed candelabra from Barbiedienne's, the heterogeneous offerings of admiring acquaintance, beautify the room. The tall looking-glass over the chimney, in its old-fashioned pillared frame, reflects firelight and colour and glitter. Heavy folds of claret-coloured cloth drape the windows. The room is full of rich yet subdued colour; the open piano, the pile of crimson-bound music-

books, the reading-stand by Myra's low arm-chair, all have their grace in his lordship's eye.

'How beautiful you would make Redhill Park!' he exclaims, thinking of that lordly mansion in Surrey, where Lady Earlswood rules supreme in a solitude as of Mount Athos or La Trappe, and carries Evangelical principles to the verge of fanaticism.

'I daresay Redhill is beautiful without any help of mine,' replies Myra, feeling that they are getting upon dangerous ground. Lord and Lady Earlswood's relations for the last five years have been an armed neutrality. Her ladyship exercises the gifts and graces of the spirit at Redhill; deals out hop-sack clothing and horse-cloth blankets, tracts, and ghostly counsel to all the old women of the neighbourhood, and never mentions his lordship without a shudder, as a brand predoomed to burning, not born that he might be judged, but judged before he was born.

His lordship meanwhile leads the life which beseems him; not a particularly profitable life, it must be owned, to himself or any one else, saving

always certain West-end tradesmen and a staff of overpaid servants. He thinks with a regretful sigh of what that ancestral home of his might have been if Myra had been in his own set, and he had met and loved her in time. Worse than vain to think of her now. It is not her virtue that appals him, but her indifference ; indifference not to himself alone, but to all things that tempt other women.

So Myra pays her rent, and Lord Earlswood tells people that that theatrical venture of his is a lucky hit, and pays him nearly five per cent. Myra occupies her old-fashioned Bloomsbury-square apartments, and lives as quietly as a curate, and is actually saving money ; for although not greedy of gain, she has had enough of the education of poverty to know that it is well to be a few hundreds in advance of one's daily needs. She dresses exquisitely on and off the stage ; but as her own artistic taste, and not other people's extravagance, rules her toilette, its cost is in no way ruinous.

Herman she sees occasionally on a Sunday afternoon, on which day her room is sometimes crowded with callers ; but not every Sunday afternoon, as he

was wont to come to her last year, dining with her sometimes, and staying late into the evening, talking literature and art, or that pleasant worldly talk in which the merits and reputations, intellectual gifts and social qualities, of our dearest friends come under the scalpel. When she upbraids him with the rareness of his visits, he tells her that he is deep in a new book, a story which is to be something better than his old stories, truer to nature, higher and purer in art; something which some other writer, lauded by qualities which he, Herman, is supposed to lack, might have written.

‘I foresee a failure,’ says Mrs. Brandreth, jealous of the work which robs her of his society. ‘Do you remember that story in Forster’s *Goldsmith* of the man who amused the audience at Covent-garden, while the curtain was down, by a very clever imitation of a cow? Emboldened by their applause he essayed other animals, when a Scottish voice from the gallery cried, “Stick to the coo, mon!” Don’t you think that having succeeded in one line it is hazardous to attempt another?’

‘Thanks for the friendly caution, but I don’t

believe honest work can ever be thrown away ; and if my next book prove a failure, the labour I shall have given it will be not the less helpful to me as an artist. There are books a man writes which are like the solfeggi that make a singer's voice flexible ; there may be nothing in the solfeggi, but when that voice attacks a real melody, the strength of past labour is its glory. I am ready to accept my failures as education.'

'How much you have altered since last winter!' says Myra thoughtfully.

'For the worse, perhaps ?'

'I won't say that ; but you have grown serious—serious *à faire frémir*.'

'May not a man be in earnest now and then ?'

'Perhaps. But the now and then should be very far apart. Your late earnestness is chronic. I want you to write me a comedy for Easter ; all grace and sparkle ; modern to extremity ; crystallising the very life of the day ; a photograph of the season ; as personal as you can make it without being libellous.'

'My Muse is not as the Muse of Foote, and does

not delight in personality. Besides, I doubt if I shall write for the stage this year.'

'What, not after the success of *Hemlock*! You have acknowledged that it has paid you better than anything you have done in literature.'

'Remuneration is not the ultimate aim of art.'

'Perhaps not; but it would be rather unkind of you to refuse to write for me, when you know that my success in life depends on the success of the Frivolity.'

'And my last piece having succeeded, does it follow that my next will be equally fortunate? The blue ribbon of the turf is rarely won two consecutive years by the same stable. Why not try a new hand?'

Myra shrugs her shoulders impatiently. She had rather fail in a play of his—or, at least, rather sustain a weak play of his by the power of her acting—than produce a better play by any one else. And he cannot see this; he cannot understand that it is sweet to her to be allied with him even in art. Those fine shades of a woman's feeling are beyond his comprehension, artist though he is.

In all their friendly intercourse of the last three years neither has ever spoken of their dead past. Myra would give worlds to break the ice that covers those deep waters of memory ; but Herman is silent, and she dare not approach the subject. However deeply he may have felt her abandonment of him long ago, he has evidently forgiven her now. The fact of his forgiveness is more galling to her soul than his fiercest wrath could be. Nay, could she but make him angry she would have cause for hope.

The season wears on—January, February, March. London is filling, but as yet there is no sign of Mr. Morcombe or of the bill for the extension of the Pen-y-craig Railway. Herman takes the trouble to hunt up a friend versed in parliamentary business, in the hope of discovering when the Pen-y-craig extension is likely to come on ; but the dim future reveals not the form of Pen-y-craig. Herman has heard nothing of the Lochwithian family from Richard Dewrance, who has accepted the charge of a Protestant flock in the south of France, where his convictions are widening every day, until between his acceptance of the reformed Church and that

older Church out of which it grew there runs but a narrow brooklet of difference.

March sees the publication of Herman's new novel, the book in which he has striven to rise out of his old familiar self into something better; the story which in his heart of hearts he has dedicated to Editha Morcombe, the girl who has been but a passing shadow across his life, and yet, unawares, has deeply influenced his thoughts.

Alas for the fate of faithful work and lofty aspirations! The book is a failure. Kindly critics condemn with faint praise, recognise the intention of the writer, applaud the idyllic simplicity of the story, the purity of the sentiments, and give their readers a general impression of weakness and a half-realised design. The *Censor*—in a slashing article three columns long—falls upon the fated volumes hip and thigh; ruthless as Jeffrey in his attack upon Wordsworth. 'Extract the acid cynicism and the half-veiled immorality from Mr. Westray's style, and the result is about as palatable as lemonade without lemon or sugar,' says the *Censor*, summing up with the grand air of papal infallibility

which distinguishes that journal. ‘*His Last Love* is a novel which a schoolgirl might be proud to have written, for the grammar is faultless and the French quotations in no case misspelt. It is a work which Mr. Tupper might father without fear of lessening his hold upon the middle-class intellect, and it is a curious illustration of the depth of bathos to which a really clever writer may descend when he tries to dazzle his admirers in a line of art for which he lacks every element of success. Only to a Balzac is it given to create two such types as Valérie de Marneffe and Eugénie Grandet. Mr. Westray’s sympathies are obviously with the former class, and his portraiture of *ces espèces* is not without merit. Let him stick to tinsel, with which he has achieved some rather brilliant effects, and not waste his labour in deep-sinking operations upon an imagination which does not abound in gold.’

No voice has come down from heaven to pronounce the *Censor* infallible, and even earthly opinion varies in its estimate of that journal’s wisdom and disinterestedness; yet this review wounds Herman as keenly as if all the voices of heaven and earth

had acknowledged the critic's judgment unassailable. His book is the expression of all that was best and truest in his mind, and neither press nor public cares a straw for it. His publishers politely regret that the second edition has been somewhat slower in sale than any previous work of the author's; altogether, Herman is compelled to confess that the book is a failure.

He drops in upon Myra on Sunday evening. Yesterday's *Censor* lies open on her reading-desk, and that expressive face of hers wears an indignant look. It changes at sight of him to a tender sympathy; she comes to him without a word and takes his hand affectionately, as if he had just lost some one very dear to him. The ridiculous element in the position strikes him sharply—despite the actual pain which has attended his disappointment.

'You were a true prophet, you see, Myra. The critics condemn my book. I see you have been reading the *Censor*.'

There is something else which he sees—traces of tears around the dark eyes—angry tears which she has wiped away hastily at his entrance.

‘It is infamous—unjust—malignant!’

‘Malignant? Not the least in the world. If I were to meet the writer to-morrow, we should be bosom friends. But the *Censor* is nothing without slashing criticism. I am sorry to say the book is a failure—even an adverse review won’t help it. But, as I told you before, a book written is so much labour done—the worker must be the better for it.’

‘Your book is lovely—I have read and cried over it—good, true, pure, noble! O Herman, if you knew how I feel any injustice to you!’

One thing he does know—that they are getting upon dangerous ground. Myra is more excited than he has ever seen her, even on the opening night of the season, when the fortunes of the new theatre were at stake. Hectic spots burn in her cheeks—the dark hazel eyes are feverishly bright.

‘It is kind and friendly of you to take this matter to heart,’ he replies in his calmest tones; ‘but, believe me, you distress yourself needlessly.’

‘Kind and friendly! How can you talk of kindness and friendliness from me to you! Herman, do

you think I have forgotten? Can you have so utterly forgotten on your part as to believe it possible for me to forget?' with passionate tears. 'I threw away your love when it was verily mine—foolish—ignorant of my own heart. O Herman, can it never be mine again? can the dear old days never come back? I was little more than a child when I wronged you, and had but a child's knowledge of your worth. I am a woman now, educated by sorrow; and my love for you—my knowledge of you—has grown with my growth. Can I never win back what I lost? Am I so worthless a creature, I whom the world praises, that my penitence and my love count for nothing with you, Herman?' she asks with piteous pleading.

Five minutes ago, and, to herself, this confession would have seemed of all things the most impossible. The words have burst from her in a little gust of passion, sudden as a stormy blast rushing in at a rashly-opened casement. She turns from Herman, after that last question, stricken with shame, and bows her head upon the mantelpiece, hiding the crimson of her tearful face.

He approaches her, takes her hand in his, ever so gently, and with gravest tenderness replies :

‘ My dear, the age of miracles is past, and in our days the dead do not come back to life. I shall be your friend always, Myra ; your lover never again.’

CHAPTER IX.

'O, fair is Love's first hope to gentle mind,
As Eve's first star through fleecy cloudlet peeping;
And sweeter than the gentle south-west wind,
O'er willowy meads and shawdow'd waters creeping,
And Ceres' golden fields!'

IN the first flush of publication, before the *Censor* and the rest of the literary journals had issued the fiat of critical opinion, Herman had sent a copy of *His Last Love* to Squire Morcombe of Lochwithian, with a polite note, in which he modestly hinted that if the ladies of the household would deign to read his book, such condescension on their part would afford him infinite gratification.

The novel has been published a month, and the author has had the satisfaction of reading criticism pitched in every key, from the C sharp minor of reprobation to the gentle E flat major of mild approval, when among his letters one morning he finds a thick packet, with the Lochwithian postmark and the monogram R. M.

It is from Ruth ; a long letter, praising his book as no one has praised it yet, with praise that comes from perfect understanding of the writer's intention, perfect sympathy with the writer's mind.

'We have shed many tears over your pages,' writes Miss Morcombe—and that little word *we* is very precious to Herman. 'We feel as if this book has made you indeed our friend. All that was harsh and cynical, all that had a false ring in your former works—pray forgive me if I am too candid—is absent here. The heart of the writer throbs in every page, and it is a noble heart. The book is full of life and truth and earnestness and faith in good things ; and I have no power to judge of books or men if it is not ultimately the most popular of all your stories, and that to which you will owe enduring fame.'

'Let the *Censor* go hang !' cries Herman, moved to enthusiasm by a woman's letter, written from a sick-room. 'One true woman's heart has been moved by my book—one pure mind has recognised its worth.'

He reads and re-reads the letter. It contains

not a word about the Lochwithian Extension—not a hint of Editha's visit to London. The railway people may have changed their minds, may have deferred their petition indefinitely. He is sorely disappointed.

‘Come what may, I shall go down to Llandrysak in July,’ he thinks, ‘and drink the waters and be made whole. Orpheus braved the burning blasts of Tartarus in quest of his love, and shall I shrink from imbibing a few pails of sulphur-water?’

And then—what then? It is not to be supposed that he, Herman Westray, a man of the world, a student of human nature, an anatomiser of other people's passions, a tranquil spectator of the great life drama—it is surely not to be supposed that he has fallen in love with a girl whom he has seen just four times, and whose education, principles, surroundings, are in every respect different from his own. No, Herman hardly believes himself in love with Editha Morcombe, but he is fain to confess that he is interested in her—ay, with something more than a mere artistic interest—that she is something more to him than a lay figure. He has thought of

her, he has wondered about her not a little in the days and nights that have gone by since he last saw her, and has even speculated upon the possibility that they two may not be, after all, so unsuited to each other as he had first believed, and so strenuously asserted to Dewrance.

He lives his life as of old—dines at his club and at other men's clubs, goes to theatres and parties, flirts occasionally with a graceful languor, says clever things, or is supposed to say them, begins another story, writes the first act of a comedy for Mrs. Brandreth, whose house he has avoided since that Sunday evening when she rashly lifted the curtain of the past, though he sees her occasionally behind the scenes at the Frivolity.

Although he does not forget Editha Morcombe, although she is often in his thoughts, her image is hardly a disturbing influence as yet. The shaft has not pierced deep enough for that. And thus time slips gently by till the first Monday in May, when Herman Westray goes to the Royal Academy to see the people and hear the public verdict on the pictures. These he has seen before—

some on the easels of the painters, all at the private view.

Here, in the crowd and the heat and the Babel of voices—not loud, but multitudinous—he comes suddenly upon some one whom he feels curiously pleased to meet.

Mr. Dewrance stands opposite a landscape of Linnell's, expounding its beauties in that loud distinct pulpit voice of his, to three young women and a showily-bonneted matron, all evidently under his wing.

‘Observe the hazy yellow atmosphere—positively steeped in light,’ he exclaims.

‘Rather like the neighbourhood of Llandrysak,’ says Herman, laying his hand upon the Curate’s shoulder.

‘Too much corn for Radnorshire—How d’ye do, Westray? Thought I knew the voice. What do you think of the pictures this year? Rather below par, eh? They paint too much, these fellows.’

‘Rubens painted too much; so would any man if he could get a thousand pounds for every square yard of canvas he could cover. I think the pictures

are pretty much as usual: manipulation in most cases good; subjects in many cases weak; ideas repetitive of last year, the year before that, and backwards to the days of Somerset House.'

'Let me introduce you to my friends. Mr. Westray—Mrs. Peacock Smith, Miss Peacock Smith, Miss Cordelia, Miss Beatrice Smith, from New York.'

The three young ladies survey Herman with wondering enthusiasm, pleased to discover that his clothes and boots are like those of other people, and that he bends himself to the usages of society so far as to have his hair cut.

'I wish he'd say something satirical,' whispers the fair Cordelia to her elder sister.

'He's one of the authors we wanted to see,' replies Miss Smith in the same undertone; 'but I don't think his looks are up to the standard of his works.'

'Where are you and what are you doing, Dewrance?' asks Herman. 'I heard you were somewhere in the south of France.'

'Only came back in April; wintered in the shel-

ter of the Pyrenees. Plenty of nice people—found myself quite absurdly popular. I am first curate at a new church in Bayswater, St. Januarius. Perhaps you know it—a very beautiful specimen of the flamboyant style, and fashionably attended. The church is filled daily at our matin service, and our collections are the largest in the parish. When will you come and dine with me? I have rooms in Bolivia-gardens, near the church.’

‘I’ll tell you that when you dine with me. You ought to have come to see me directly you established yourself in London.’

‘I have been intending to come, but my duties are so absorbing.’

‘Naturally, with a fashionable congregation. Those duties include a good deal of dining out, to say nothing of kettledrums and friendly luncheons. As if I didn’t know you, Dewrance.’

The Curate grins. The Peacock Smiths gaze at Herman with eyes enlarged by wonder, surprised that any one should venture to address a popular pastor in so mundane a tone.

‘Come and breakfast with me to-morrow,’ says

Herman by and by, after having performed a little small talk with the Miss Smiths, who exclaim, 'How lovely!' 'How sweet!' at every second canvas they see, and are deeply interested in the five different Ophelias which, more or less drowning, grace the walls of the Academy and impart a sense of damp and depression to the exhibition.

'After matins?' inquires Dewrance.

'Of course—say ten o'clock; and we can talk of our friends in Wales. By the way, have you heard from the Lochwithian people lately?'

'I dined with them the day before yesterday.'

'In London?'

'Yes. They have taken apartments in Lima-crescent, near me—or rather, I should say, I took the rooms for them, the Squire having intrusted me with the selection.'

'Have they been in town long?' asks Herman, with a mortified look.

'Not more than a week, I think. Mr. Morcombe was talking of calling on you.'

'He is very good,' says Herman, who finds it bitter that Dewrance should have been preferred to

him. Yet the preference is but natural, Dewrance being the older friend.

Mr. Morcombe leaves his card at Mr. Westray's chambers three days later, having most likely received a reminder from the Curate, Herman thinks, with a twinge of vexation. The young man is out when the Squire calls; but he presents himself at Lima-crescent next day, and is fortunate enough to find Editha at home.

She has come to town under the wing of a middle-aged cousin, a clergyman's widow, and altogether a prosperous comfortable personage, with a large appetite for small pleasures—a lady who has been buried alive in a remote Welsh parish during the brightest years of womanhood, and who is glad to make the most of her decline. Not a wrinkle has Time written on Mrs. Evan Williams's placid brow, nor has that avenger thinned her brown hair. Middle age has come upon her gently, with gradual increase of bulk and a subsidiary chin or two. She carries about her, as it were, an atmosphere of the country, wears her watch conspicuously displayed below her waistband, and a handsome silk

gown, which is new as to material, but ten years old as to cut.

Editha's bright look is full of welcome, Herman thinks, as she turns from the ferncase in the window and comes forward to receive him.

'I thought you would come to see us,' she says; and then introduces him to 'my cousin, Mrs. Williams,' whom she addresses presently as Juliana; whereat the fair Juliana becomes immediately upon intimate terms with Mr. Westray, and goes into raptures about his books.

'Editha has them all; and when I stay at the Priory I get her to lend them to me. I have sat up ever so late, night after night, reading them; and now to think of seeing the writer! It does seem so extraordinary. Of course I always knew they must be written by somebody, but I never thought it would be my fate to meet him.'

Such a simple-minded chaperon as this is the next best thing to no chaperon at all, Herman thinks, and he and Editha talk as freely as if they were alone—talk of Ruth and Wales; of Mr. Petherick and his flock; of literature, art, music, all things

dear to both ; Editha making friendly little appeals to Juliana every now and then, lest that comfortable matron should fancy herself excluded from their talk. In the course of conversation Mrs. Williams makes numerous inquiries about theatres and popular concerts, and it appears to Herman that she is thirsting for amusement of the dramatic and musical kind ; whereupon he hastens to promise private boxes for fashionable theatres and tickets for ballad concerts.

‘ I do love English ballads,’ exclaims the matron, ‘ though I’m afraid I can’t claim to be as musical as the rest of my nation ; for when it comes to chamber-music, and a symphony that lasts a quarter of an hour, I must say I feel myself out of place, and often in the minor passages I’m on tenter-hooks, thinking that the performers are all going wrong. So give me a simple ballad, and the words pronounced so that I can hear them ; and then I know where I am and what I am called upon to admire.’

‘ You like the theatres, Miss Morcombe ?’ inquires Herman, after politely sympathising with Mrs. Williams on the chamber-music question.

‘I expect to be delighted; but we have been to no theatre yet. Papa took us to the Opera last night, and that was more exquisite than I have ever fancied it in my dreams.’

‘You would like to see some of the theatres?’

‘Very much; I am particularly anxious to see your comedy at the Frivolity.’

Easter is past, but *Hemlock* has not yet been taken out of the bill.

‘Would you really like to see it?’ exclaims Herman, delighted. ‘Will you go to-night? I can always get a box; I’ll go to the nearest office and telegraph for a good one, if you’ll say yes.’

Editha hesitates. ‘I don’t know what engagements papa may have for to-night,’ she says.

‘Indeed, my dear Editha, your papa’s engagements need not prevent our going,’ exclaims Mrs. Williams. ‘Am I not here to take you about? Did not the Squire expressly say that we are to enjoy ourselves without reference to his occupations? And indeed he is very much occupied about this Pen-y-craig Extension, and has to dine out a great deal; for it seems that these public works

hinge upon private dining. Did he not say that we could go anywhere we liked this evening with Mr. Hetheridge ?

Editha blushes furiously.

‘Hetheridge!’ cries Herman, reddening as vividly.

‘Is Mr. Hetheridge in London ?’

‘Yes, he is here for the season,’ replies Mrs. Williams. ‘You know him, do you, Mr. Westray ? Isn’t he nice ?’

‘If I had ever been able to arrive at the exact meaning ladies attach to that adjective, I could give you a categorical answer. Honestly, I have seen too little of Mr. Hetheridge to express an opinion about him.’

‘Come, Editha, why should we not accept Mr. Westray’s kind offer ?’ asks Mrs. Williams. ‘Mr. Hetheridge is to dine with us this evening. If Mr. Westray would join us at dinner, we could all go to the Frivolity together. I suppose a box would hold four ?’

‘Certainly,’ says Herman, thinking of those snug little satin-lined boxes, and how closely he will have to bend over Editha’s chair all the even-

ing. 'I accept your kind invitation with pleasure, Mrs. Williams, and I'll go and despatch my telegram directly, dress, and return here.'

'At seven. Will that be early enough, by the bye?'

'Quite, if you want only to see my piece. It begins at half-past eight.'

Editha makes no further objections to the plan, and Herman departs, foolishly happy for so slight a reason. He is back again in Lima-crescent at a quarter to seven, and finds Mr. Hetheridge installed. That gentleman is sitting next to Editha, and talking to her in an undertone, as she bends over her point-lace, but the conversation does not appear particularly lively.

The young landowner is surprised, and not agreeably, at the entrance of Mr. Westray, and the two men glower at each other as they exchange greetings.

'Hang the fellow, what is he doing here?' thinks Vivian Hetheridge, unaware until this moment of the pleasure that awaited him.

'Mr. Westray has kindly suggested that we

shall all go to the Frivolity Theatre this evening,' says Mrs. Williams, who begins dimly to divine that she has done hardly a wise thing in inviting Herman. Every one at Lochwithian wishes Editha to marry Mr. Hetheridge; nay, it is an understood thing that she is to marry him—that it is for her ultimate good here and hereafter to be Mrs. Hetheridge of Hetheridge Park, and that any capricious objections of her own are to be overruled by the powers that be. Mr. Morcombe has bidden his daughter and her cousin to amuse themselves, to extract all the pleasure they can from a month or six weeks in London; but he has imagined that the companion of their pleasures, their escort, their guide, would be none other than Vivian Hetheridge, who is supposed to be, for two or three months in the year, a man about town.

Mrs. Williams is quick to see that there is something more than common courtesy in Herman's attention, that there are germs of jealousy sprouting in the hotbed of Vivian's heart, and that, in a general way, she has made a mistake. But being by nature a lively matron, and by long

suppression of that natural liveliness made livelier, she does not abandon herself to affliction, but enjoys herself so thoroughly as to impart a sense of enjoyment to others.

It is the pleasantest little dinner-party in the world. The Squire has come home only to dress, and gone forth again to dine, too hurried to hear the plans of his womankind. The two young men brighten wonderfully at the dinner-table, but Herman has in every way the best of it. He knows so much—can talk of so much—has ideas of his own which, if of no great intrinsic worth, have at least the charm of novelty, just as some modern invention—Abyssinian, Peruvian, or Zanzibar gold—sparkles prettily for the moment, though but basest metal. Editha is gaiety itself. No trace of the serious young woman here, thinks Herman, and anon reflects that seriousness with her is so gracious a quality, that she is loveliest when most earnest. They talk a good deal of Wales, and Herman is almost sentimental in his affectionate recollection of the scenery; as if Radnorshire had been the cradle of his infancy.

Mr. Hetheridge is not enthusiastic about the evening's entertainment.

'Yes, I've seen it,' he says; 'pretty theatre, very bright and lively, clever acting, and so on. Don't care much for the piece.' Mrs. Williams frowns at him. 'O, quite correct, you know, and all that, but not much in it; wants go; too classical for my taste.'

'I am sorry I did not hit upon the exact style of thing you can appreciate,' says Herman, with the air of a Mortlake market-gardener who has been told that a predatory ass does not admire the flavour of his asparagus. 'I'll try my best next time.'

'What, is it your play?' exclaims Mr. Hetheridge.

'Didn't you know?' asks Editha, laughing at her admirer's confusion.

'No; I never look to see who writes the plays. I thought they were most of 'em sent over from France, and translated by clerks in Somerset House.'

The Frivolity is looking its brightest when the

two ladies and their escorts enter their box—Editha in palest gray silk, that shadowy tint she so much affects, with rare old lace ruffles, a crimson rose in her hair, and a loosely-tied crimson sash; altogether more like a portrait by Gainsborough than a fashionable young lady. She is delighted with the pretty little theatre, which contrasts pleasantly with the grandeur of Covent Garden, the only other playhouse she has seen.

She rests her round white arm, half veiled by the Malines ruffle, on the violet cushion, and fixes her eyes on the stage with that absorbed attention only known among provincial playgoers. The curtain has risen; she listens attentively; and Herman, standing behind her chair, feels as if all the audiences who have seen and applauded his play were as nothing compared with this one spectator.

Presently Mrs. Brandreth enters as Helena the slave. She slowly unveils, while the audience applaud, and those swift dark eyes of hers glance round the house. She sees Herman standing behind Editha's chair—sees him, and one little agi-

tated movement of the hand which lifts her veil indicates that she has seen him.

She is at her best from that moment; every nerve braced like those of the gladiator who knows that the greatness of Rome is watching him. More than once in the course of the play the keen dark eyes glance at Herman's box, and mark the fair freshness of the provincial beauty, the bright happy expression, so intent, so earnest, so curiously different from the faded languid look of a soul that has squandered its inheritance of joy.

'I never was like that,' Myra says to herself.
'I was too ambitious to be happy.'

She looks back at her youth, and remembers that it was a restless desire for something better and brighter than youth's simple pleasures. Looks back, and remembers the days when Herman loved her, and when the glory of his love was as nothing to her in the vivid light of those ambitious dreams. Fame has come to her, but love is lost. And now fame seems small and worthless measured against the infinite sweetness of that vanished love.

She stands at the wing—unseen, and gazes

her fill at Editha. The nobility of the girl's face impresses her, just as it impressed Herman at the Eisteddfod. Who is she? Some mere acquaintance of the hour, perhaps, to whom it is necessary for Herman to be civil. Yet how he bends over her chair; what a tender look steals over his countenance as he stoops to hear her half-whispered praise of the acting or the play!

Myra Brandreth turns from the sight sick at heart. She has not yet taught herself to despair of winning him again, despite those calm deliberate words which pronounced the doom of a dead love. She trusts in the praises of others, an ever-widening renown, new and striking achievements in her art, to charm the dead love to life. She will not admit to herself that she has failed. He is proud; he is resentful; but in his inmost heart the old love lives yet. The sight of this fair strange face has kindled a fire in her breast. She acts with a force which is new even to Herman.

'How natural, how wonderful she is!' whispers Editha, tears shining in her soft gray eyes.

‘By Heaven she is a great creature!’ exclaims Herman as the curtain falls. ‘She surpasses herself. She is all force and passion and feeling; all fire and light. I feel as if I had been watching a disembodied spirit—genius divorced from clay.’

CHAPTER X.

‘Seul, il marchait tout nu dans cette mascarade
Qu’on appelle la vie, en y parlant tout haut.
Tel que la robe d’or du jeune Alcibiade,
Son orgueil indolent, du palais au ruisseau,
Trainait derrière lui comme un royal manteau.’

WEARILY Mrs. Brandreth returns to the greenroom when the piece is over. Lord Earlswood is lounging against the chimney-piece, talking to a gentleman in evening dress with his opera-hat under his arm. His lordship has the privilege of admission to the greenroom of his own building, and takes upon himself the farther license of bringing a friend with him on occasions, a liberty which Mrs. Brandreth disapproves.

This gentleman in the faultless evening dress—lapels of coat and waistcoat in the very last fashion prescribed by Savile-row—with a pink diamond solitaire clasping his narrow collar, and no other jewelry whatsoever, is a man tolerably well known at the Frivolity and at other West-end theatres; a man

whose entrance to the stalls is generally chronicled by the confidential whisper of his name among the well informed of the audience.

This gentleman is Hamilton Lyndhurst, stock-broker and millionaire; a man who has owned newspapers, and racehorses, and prize yachts, and a theatre or two, and a fashionable chapel, and a railway, and a diamond mine, and could, in a general way, buy up the nation, if that little lot were to come into the market; a man who, in the old imperial days of Rome's decadence, would have made a bid for the empire, and gilded his horses' oats, and imported oysters from Britain, and diverted the course of the public aqueducts to water his gardens.

He is a large lazy-looking man, with a tendency to loll against any convenient angle, to lean over the back of a chair or attach himself diagonally to a mantelpiece, rather than sustain himself in an upright position of his own unaided strength. The young men at one of his clubs call him the Leaning Tower of Pisa. He has been handsome, is so still even, at five-and-forty, in a large and massive style. He is popular, and has numerous admirers—first,

among the people who worship wealth ; and next, among those who admire iniquity on a grandiose scale. Hamilton Lyndhurst rejoices in one of the worst reputations ever bestowed upon a man who has not actually outraged the criminal code of his country. How far he is worthy of his reputation, or how much better than his reputation, is a question that he alone could answer, and, as he glories in his evil renown, it is a question likely to remain unanswered. He is no smooth-faced hypocrite, and has at least the merit of never having pretended to be virtuous. His theory is that there is no virtue in the world, except on the lips of those dependent wretches who cannot afford to avow their real sentiments ; a Philistine crew, who keep up their pretence of righteousness as part of their stock-in-trade, who practise the rites and ceremonies of a religion they secretly despise, and preach a code of morality against which their inward natures are in perpetual revolt. Religion, morality, domestic affection, manly honour, womanly virtue, are, in his mind, so many compromises which dependence makes with the world.

‘ If you could all get sixty per cent for your

money, we should hear less of church-going and the rest of your twaddle,' he says with conviction.

He is unmarried, and his most intimate associates have never heard of any creature of his kin who depends upon him, or is aided or befriended by him. Brother or sister, nephew or niece, cousin or hanger-on, he has none. He is as solitary as Lucifer after his fall, and, as Lucifer, stands like a tower, and requires neither sympathy nor companionship. Even the parasites who hang upon the wealthy have no hold upon him. He gives breakfasts and dinners and suppers at his clubs or at public restaurants, and has his favourite companions, whom he changes almost as often as his gloves ; passing the boon companion of last season with a careless nod this year, and hearing of an ancient crony's death with about as much emotion as the Regent Orleans displayed at the decease of his dear friend and tutor, Dubois. He is not unsocial in his habits, but his sociality is all out of doors. Within his gates his intimates have never passed. He has a house in the neighbourhood of Parson's-green ; large, gloomy, shut in by high walls, bordering upon market-gardens, and in a

region where autumn fogs are densest and linger longest. Wild are the imaginings with which active minds have indulged themselves about this house; its Oriental splendour, its more than Roman iniquity. Graphic and full of detail are the stories which are related of Saturnalia and Eleusinian mysteries held within those walls; but as none of the story-tellers have ever seen the marvels they describe so vividly, the basis of their statements is somewhat unsubstantial.

The butcher and the baker go in and out, with their neat little carts and clever ponies, as freely and cheerfully as to other houses; and if questioned about this modern temple of Eleusis, have no more to say than that Mr. Lyndhurst is quite the gentleman in the matter of paying his bills, and not 'worritting about a ticket with every blessed pound of steak, as some people calling themselves gentlefolks do.'

Mr. Lyndhurst is more or less 'in society;' that is to say, he is invited to a great many parties in the season, to which he goes or does not go, as the fancy of the moment prompts; but the *crème de la crème*, the *dessus du panier*, know very little of Mr. Lynd-

hurst, or only have him pointed out to them in the Park as a man who drives a seven-hundred-guinea pair of horses—chestnut steppers, seventeen hands high—and has made no end of money—somehow. Some of Mr. Lyndhurst's acquaintance call these bright-chestnut beasts Shadrach and Meshach, because they look as if they had just come out of the burning fiery furnace which Nebuchadnezzar ordered for those offenders. Indeed, Mr. Lyndhurst and his horses have a somewhat diabolical look; and if Me-
phistopheles were permitted to drive a mail phaeton with brass-mounted harness, one could fancy his earthly semblance not unlike that of Hamilton Lyndhurst.

Country houses, and those social gatherings where a man becomes a domestic animal, unfolds himself, and reveals his idiosyncrasies, pleasing or unpleasing, Mr. Lyndhurst does not affect. He is never met hanging-up holly in ancient halls or kissing portly matrons under the mistletoe. Feminine society is his broadly-declared aversion, and except the one woman he happens to be pursuing for the time being—as Faust followed Gretchen, and without need of

evil promptings from the embodied evil at Faust's elbow—the sex has no existence for him.

Yet although he avows his sentiments upon all subjects with a praiseworthy candour, and is proud to confess himself an infidel and a profligate, there are circles in which he is not only tolerated but welcomed; mothers who would give him one of their daughters to-morrow with a generous confidence in his latent nobility, and a pious belief in the time-honoured maxim that a reformed rake is the best of husbands.

Lord Earlswood and Hamilton Lyndhurst have been cronies for the last two or three seasons, and his lordship's downward career may be said to have taken its fatal dip during this time. Earlswood, the weaker vessel, finds much to admire in the splendid iniquity of his acquaintance. That utter casting-off of moral restraint, which Lyndhurst calls getting rid of prejudice and compromise, has a fascination for the feebler sinner. Lyndhurst has a knack of expressing himself which, with his own particular set, passes for wit. No masculine dinner-table is dull when he is seated at it; no smoking-room conversa-

tion lacks vivacity when he is present. Earlswood, who has very little to say for himself, and rarely starts an opinion, admires and envies this gift of utterance. He likes, too, to associate with a man who is never likely to want anything from him, and the knowledge of Lyndhurst's wealth gives him a sense of security.

'A fellow who can be amusing without winding up by asking one to back his bill,' says his lordship in praise of the stockbroker.

It was Lyndhurst who suggested the building of the Frivolity. Having originated the idea, he naturally considers the theatre open to him as an agreeable lounge. He affects not to see that his presence is unwelcome to Mrs. Brandreth; brings her bouquets and rare orchids and ferns for her Bloomsbury drawing-room—he has tried bracelets, but these have been rejected—and does his best to be on good terms with her; in return for which attentions she is coldly civil to him.

'Where did Westray pick up that lovely girl with the red rose in her hair?' asks Mr. Lyndhurst, after he has shaken hands with Mrs. Brandreth, who sinks

on the ottoman exhausted, and with an inward trembling, as of one who has passed through some ordeal of flesh and spirit bitter as the pains of death. It is Mr. Lyndhurst's manner to speak of women as if they were weeds growing by the wayside; a stray wild-flower here and there to be gathered for its prettiness or perfume, the rest left to unlamented decay.

'Don't know, I'm shaw,' replies Lord Earlswood; 'not a bad-looking girl.'

'Not bad-looking! Why, man, she's superb. The handsomest woman I've seen for a year, with the usual exception in favour of present company,' adds Mr. Lyndhurst, turning to Mrs. Brandreth with a smile which some experience of her sex has taught him to consider irresistible.

'Pray put me out of the question,' says Myra coldly; 'I belong to the past.'

'Do you know that lady in the box, Mrs. Brandreth?'

'Not in the least. Some country cousin of Mr. Westray's, I should think, from her attention to the performance. Yet I never heard of any cousins of his.'

‘And you have known him long, I believe?’

‘We were children together.’

‘What does it matter who the lady is, Lyndhurst?’ says Lord Earlswood. ‘Whoever she is, she is not your style.’

‘Who taught you to know my style?’

‘Well—er—judging by the women I’ve seen you admire,’ falters his lordship, embarrassed by the curt inquiry.

‘If I wear a rosebud in my coat to-day, is that any reason I should not prefer a lily of the valley to-morrow?’ asks Hamilton Lyndhurst. ‘With regard to the lady we saw to-night, I took particular notice of her simply because she is the handsomest woman I have seen for a long time, and I wondered how Mr. Westray came by her. My interest in the lady begins and ends at that point.’

‘You know Westray?’ suggests Lord Earlswood.

‘Yes, I meet him occasionally in society; and he belongs to one of my clubs—the Junior Thespians. Not a bad sort of fellow, but with an overweening opinion of himself.’

‘Literary men always have,’ remarks his lordship, with placid conviction. ‘That’s how it is they never save money. They think their candle is going to burn for ever; and some day it goes out with a sudden puff, and leaves them paupers.’

‘As I happen to know Mr. Westray much better than either of you, permit me to say that he has not an exaggerated opinion of his own merits,’ observes Myra. ‘He is too much an artist to be conceited.’

‘Raffaelle was a very fair painter,’ remarks Hamilton Lyndhurst; ‘but tradition informs us that he was an ineffable snob.’

‘You had better be careful how you talk of Westray, Lyndhurst,’ says Lord Earlswood. ‘He is a favourite here.’

‘He has reason to be,’ replies Myra, gathering up the loose white cloak which she wears at the wing and rising to retire to her dressing-room, ‘for his talent has made your theatre.’

‘Pshaw! a mere adaptation, which a dozen men about London could have done as well as he.’

‘I don’t think there are a dozen men who can

write better than Emile Augier, and Mr. Westray's comedy is better than Augier's,' answers Myra; and then bids the two gentlemen good-night with a final tone which means that they are not to linger in the hope of escorting her to her carriage.

'Considering the money you've spent upon this place, she's not particularly civil,' observes Mr. Lyndhurst as the door closes on Mrs. Brandreth. 'Another woman would at least pretend to be grateful.'

'I don't want pretences; and Mrs. Brandreth is not like other women,' answers his lordship sulkily. 'Are you coming to the club for a rubber?'

'No; I am due at two or three places. I forget half the parties I'm asked to; but I make a round now and then, just to see what's going on.'

'I hate parties,' says Lord Earlswood. 'I think I shall go round and see the burlesque. 'I've seen it three-and-twenty times; but it rather improves on acquaintance; the jokes get a mellow flavour, and one knows when they're coming, which is always an advantage. I believe that's why people

like the *School for Scandal*; they know when they ought to laugh.'

His lordship lets himself through his own particular door and into his own particular box; Hamilton Lyndhurst retires to the lobby to watch the departures, lying in wait for Mr. Westray's unknown beauty.

She comes at last, leaning on Herman's arm, tranquil as a cloudless summer morning, and with that happy look of an unshadowed life which strikes deep to the hearts of worldlings. They have to wait for the carriage, and Hamilton Lyndhurst seizes upon Herman and shakes hands with effusion.

'Where have you been hiding yourself, West-ray? I haven't seen you for an age; and I want you to join my party for the Derby. You disappointed me last year, you know. Rather too bad!'

'What a delightful man!' thinks Mrs. Williams, awed by Mr. Lyndhurst's bulky splendour, his dark eyes, large pale face, and carefully-trained black whiskers.

'You're very kind. I can't pledge myself for

the Derby yet a while. You'd better not keep a place for me.'

'Mr. Murcum's carriage!' roars the waterman.

'Good-night.'

Herman and his charge pass out through the swinging crimson doors, Mrs. Williams and Mr. Hetheridge follow, and Hamilton Lyndhurst has gained no more than a nearer view of the unknown beauty, and the knowledge that her name, or her people's name, is something that watermen can make into Murcum.

'Who is she?' he wonders. 'Not his fiancée' They were on too ceremonious terms. Respectable, without doubt; rural respectability was written in every fold of the elder lady's garments. I saw the carriage—only a hired brougham; no mistaking the coachman's drab overcoat. Ergo, that lovely girl is a respectable nobody, whom Westray wants to marry. Quite out of my line, Earlswood says. I am not so sure about that. Upon my soul, I don't know but that such a girl as that might tempt me to give the lie to all my previous life, and go in for marriage and respectability; slip the cable of

the past, open my house to society, and get a seat in Parliament. There may be worse turns in the wheel than that in the whirligig of life. I shouldn't object to respectability and the orthodox dinner-table—the palladium of British virtue—if I could find a woman handsome enough to make other men envious, and clever enough to keep me in good humour.'

A little later, and Mrs. Brandreth sits before her dressing-table, looking at her haggard face in the glass. She has changed her stage costume for a fawn-coloured cashmere gown, made with puritan simplicity; she has washed off paint and powder and artistic darkening of the arched brows, and looks ten years older than the Helena of the play. Rigid and pale and drawn looks the small face, with its delicate sharply-cut features—a face that will age soon assuredly; dark and gloomy is the fixed gaze of the large hazel eyes, bent downwards, staring into the dimly-lighted glass, and seeing nothing.

'God keep him from loving any one else!' she whispers, as if to some listening spirit. 'My hatred would be fatal to her.'

CHAPTER XI.

‘Oftmals hab’ ich geirrt und habe mich wieder gefunden,
Aber glücklicher nie ; nun ist diess Mädchen mein Glück !
Ist auch dieses ein Irrthum, so schont mich ihr klügeren
Götter,
Und benehmt mir ihn erst drüben am kalten Gestad’.

‘She did not weep,
But o’er her meek eyes came a happy mist,
Like that which kept the heart of Eden green
Before the useful trouble of the rain.’

IN most lives there comes an Indian summer. Five years ago Herman Westray’s favourite complaint was that he had lived his life ; that dreams and desires and hope, and even ambition, had come to an end for him ; that he had no expectation of ever doing better work, or winning wider renown, or being in any wise better or happier for the passage of the coming years. To-day he feels as if life were beginning again, as if the gates of a new world had opened to him. In a word, he is in love

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—in love with a good woman, in whose faith and constancy he has no shadow of doubt.

Mr. Morcombe is very busy in one way and another, or affects to be very busy; and is rarely to be found at Lima-crescent between breakfast and dinner—not often in the evening. Mrs. Williams does her best to encourage Vivian Hetheridge, whom she considers the proper person for Editha to marry; but she does not discourage Herman Westray, from whom flows a perennial stream of theatre, concert, and picture-gallery tickets, and whose society she infinitely prefers to the young Squire's rather heavy company. Vivian is apt to be sulky, and is fitful in his visits; now calling every day, and sitting for an hour or so gloomy as the statue in *Don Giovanni*; anon absenting himself for a week. Alas for unrequited love, it is ever at a disadvantage.

So Herman and Editha have their days and evenings very much to themselves; kindly pleasure-loving Mrs. Williams counting for so little. Dewrance calls once or twice a week, and sees victory in Herman's manner, and has a perfect understand-

ing of all that is going on. He is not ill natured, and, having long ago accepted his own defeat, beholds Herman's success without rancour.

'Be a kind and faithful husband to her, West-ray,' he says one night, when they leave Lima-crescent together, after an evening spent in talk and music, 'and I shall never grudge you your happiness.'

'Kind and faithful I will be to her to the end of life,' answers Herman; 'her faithful friend, her devoted servant, if she will give me no higher privilege. But it is rather too early for congratulations, my dear Dewrance. I am sure of myself, but not sure of her.'

'I am,' replies the Curate briefly.

'You think she likes me—a little.'

'I think you are fools both; so blindly in love that you cannot see how ill suited you are to each other; yet you made a strong point of that unfitness when we talked of Miss Morcombe of Llandrysak.'

'That was before I loved her. Love makes one bold. You remember what Richard Steele said of his wife, "To love her is a liberal education."

Love shall be my master, and teach me to be worthy of my mistress.'

'And for your sake she will throw over as good a fellow as ever breathed, and one of the finest estates in Denbighshire.'

'You mean Hetheridge?' says Herman indifferently. 'Editha has too much mind to be happy with a member of the bovine family, a ruminating animal who never said a wise thing and never did a foolish one.'

Not long after this conversation Vivian Hetheridge tempts evil fortune by declaring his love, dimly conscious of its hopelessness, but bent on telling his story, even to unwilling ears.

He has found Editha alone, Mrs. Williams having gone to buy bargains in the 'Grove,' otherwise Westbourne, which she regards as a 'little heaven here below' in the way of millinery. He has surprised Editha at her piano in the back drawing-room, brooding over one of Mendelssohn's dreamiest compositions, full of thought and perplexity as she plays. She has received a letter from Ruth this morning which has set her thinking.

‘Sorry to disturb you at your practice, Editha,’ says Mr. Hetheridge, as they shake hands. They are friends of such long standing that he has acquired the right to use her Christian name.

‘I was not practising, and you have not disturbed me, thanks. I was only thinking,’ replies Editha, going to the open window, where a screen of flowers shuts out a restricted view of yard, cistern, wall, and mews. Vivian follows her to the window, and they both give their attention to the geraniums.

‘Not thinking about anything unpleasant, I hope? You were looking uncommonly serious when I came in.’

‘Was I? No, my thoughts were not unpleasant. I was only thinking that I had been away from home a long time, and that I ought to go back to Ruth.’

‘Poor Ruth! Yes, she’ll miss you, won’t she? Rather dull at the Priory for her when you are away, not being able to move about and take a pleasure in the stable, or the piggeries, or the poultry, or anything enlivening. She must miss you sadly.’

Editha answers with a sigh, ashamed to know that, dearly as she loves her sister, it will cost her a pang to return to Lochwithian.

‘Yes, she must miss you,’ repeats Mr. Hetheridge, with an unpleasant tendency to harp on one string; ‘and if you were to leave Lochwithian altogether, settle ever so far away—marry some professional or literary man, for instance, who would be obliged to spend the best part of his days in London—I should think it would break Ruth’s heart.’

Still no answer; Editha’s face is hidden as she bends over the flower-pots, twisting and untwisting fragile sprays of maiden-hair.

‘Editha, it would be a hard thing for Ruth if you were to desert her—a hard thing for all of us, who have loved you faithfully for years, if you were to leave us for the love of a stranger,’ says Vivian, rushing blindly to his doom; ‘hardest of all for me. You know how I have loved you ever since I knew the meaning of man’s love for woman. Everybody who knows us knows my love. It has been part of myself; the best and brightest half of my nature.

It will be while I live. Don't throw away the honest love of a lifetime for the sake of a stranger, Editha ; a stranger who would part you from your own flesh and blood, from all those poor creatures about Lochwithian who love you and depend on you ; from the children you have taught, from the sick you have nursed, from the heathens you have made into Christians. Think of Ruth, think of all of us,' putting himself very low down among the poor of Lochwithian, 'and pause before you let Herman Westray tempt you away from your home.'

'Who told you that Mr. Westray has asked me to leave my home?' exclaims Editha with a flash of anger. 'He never has.'

'What does it matter when the question comes ? It will be asked. He will have no scruple in taking you away from all who love you. He will think his love of yesterday's growth good enough to set against all the devotion that has ever been given you. Do you think he will consider Ruth's loss, or your father's, or mine, or all the people in Lochwithian parish ? He wants you for himself. What are we that we should stand in his way ?'

‘Vivian, it is most unfair in you to talk like this.’

‘Is it? If I held my peace much longer, should I have the chance of speaking to you at all upon this one subject? A few days later, and you would strike me dumb at the outset by telling me that you were Westray’s promised wife. I want to have my innings first, though I may know the game lost ever so long ago. Editha, if you would only consider what you lose in caring for that man! Your sweet home life, your power to do good, to reign over a larger parish than Lochwithian, yet live near enough to Lochwithian to continue and extend all the good works you have begun there, to make sunshine in the land. Marry me, and there need be no parting between you and Ruth. My home shall be her home, and may ruin light upon it if she is ever less than its most honoured inmate! Editha, I know Ruth likes me; I know that Ruth has been my friend always; and I think she would be glad to see my suit prosper.’

Tears are in Editha’s eyes as she raises them from that mute contemplation of the ferns and flowers.

‘It is a pity we cannot command our hearts,’ she replies gently. ‘I know how good you are, how true, how unselfish, and I know how much my dear sister esteems you; but I cannot give you what you ask. I cannot, even to lead a calm happy life near my dear old home, even for Ruth’s sake, give you love for love. I would not give less than you offer me—a whole heart.’

‘If you had never seen Herman Westray—’

‘If there had been no such person as Mr. Westray, my answer would have been the same.’

‘I don’t believe it,’ cries Vivian angrily. ‘His coming changed you. He, a stranger, came between you and the love that had followed your footsteps since you were a child. Editha, think how little you know of him; how he can but give you at most a divided heart, putting the best part of himself into his books; dependent upon public favour; miserable, if newspapers withhold their praise. There can be no such thing as domestic peace with such a man as that; a man who writes plays, who hangs about the side scenes, and knows half the actresses in London. Is that a man to

offer you an established home, a happy tranquil life? Be warned in time, Editha, for Ruth's sake, for mine, if not for your own. Give me half your heart, if you cannot give me all. Give me your pity, your toleration. I do not ask measure for measure; only let me love you and watch over your life, and the study of my days shall be to make you happy.'

'You are too good, too generous to me, but most ungenerous to Mr. Westray, who has done you no wrong. I have tried for a long while to make you understand that there was no possibility of our ever being more to each other than we are to-day—I hope—true and loyal friends. It is not my fault if you have been blind to the truth, if you have cherished ideas which I have never sanctioned or encouraged. Let this be our first and last discussion of this kind, Vivian,' she concludes with kindly firmness.

'Well, I think I knew my fate before I came here to-day,' he says, after a little pause, pale with anger and grief, 'but I was bent upon saying my say. I thank you for your plain speaking,' with

a little bitter laugh. 'You have left no room for doubt. All is said—all is ended. The hope of my manhood goes down like a broken-backed ship at sea—all hands on board, nothing saved from the wreck. So be it, Editha. Heaven knows, if I feel this keenly, my pain is not altogether selfish. I am sorry for all of us—sorry for Ruth, sorry for your father, for the poor people at Lochwithian who love you—sorriest of all for you.'

'I don't understand why you should compassionate me,' she answers, stung by the conclusion of his speech.

'I daresay not. Love is notoriously blind. You will understand me too well in days to come. Good-bye, Editha.' He offers his hand, looking at her with a piteous tenderness.

'Good-bye, Vivian. And O, if I have thoughtlessly given you pain, I most humbly beg you to forgive me.'

'My dear, there can be no question of forgiveness between you and me. Your dog, if you flogged him, would crawl to your feet and fawn upon you half an hour afterwards. Think of me as you think

of your dog. I can take my punishment, and still be faithful; and if ever there shall come a day when you have need of my love, put it to the proof. You shall not find it wanting.'

They shake hands and part; and Editha feels more pain than she has ever known before from any act of her own—suffers as she might suffer if she had hurt her horse or her dog, blindly-faithful creatures that worship her. Her conscience is racked with the thought that she might have saved Vivian this agony of to-day. She has tried her best to let him see the vanity of his hopes; but she is not the less remorseful, feeling that his pain must be in some measure her fault.

The next day is the 4th of June, Speech-day at Eton. Herman and the Curate have made an engagement with the two ladies to take them down to Windsor by rail, and show them the castle and park, the river and college, St. George's Chapel, and, in short, all the lions of the most delightful show-place in the world. These innocent Cambrians have never seen the mediæval pile, British royalty's only royal abode, nor the Forest, nor Virginia Water, nor the

schools which Henry VI. founded for deserving lads of humble condition.

They are to start directly after breakfast, arrive at Windsor by eleven o'clock, see castle and chapel, drive in the Forest and walk by the placid waters of Virginia, lunch at the Wheatsheaf, then back to Windsor, where Herman is to charter a wherry and row them up to Surly Hall. He proposes a dinner at the Castle or White Hart, but the ladies prefer returning to a German tea in Lima-crescent, and Herman is content to accept the German tea, looking forward to a friendly evening afterwards.

He wonders at himself a little on the morning of the 4th—a gracious June morning, with the balmy breath of summer sweetening the air—wonders that he, of all men, should be looking forward with delight to the prospect of escorting two country-bred females through the familiar glades of Windsor, or rowing them on gentle Thames, performing, in fact, all those functions which he has been wont to ascribe solely to the tame-cat species. ‘Love makes tame cats of the best of us,’ he says to himself apologetically. ‘Samson and Hercules, Pericles,

Nero, all in the same boat. Dear Dewrance ! How nice it is of him to lend himself to our pleasures, knowing, as he must know, that his portion will be Mrs. Williams !'

Happy morning in the fair June sunlight, which glorifies even the prosaic Paddington platform, with its labyrinthine lines going to all corners of the earth ; its bewildering ticket-offices ; its mountainous piles of luggage, and all-pervading porters rushing at the unoffending traveller with trucks. Editha and Mrs. Williams meet the two gentlemen at the station : the elder lady glorious in silver-gray moire and a black-lace shawl ; the younger in some simple straw-coloured fabric, pale and cool, and a rustic Dunstable hat, which might be what milliners call 'trying' to a less perfect face.

Herman has secured a compartment—has taken the tickets. There is no bewilderment, no going astray upon platforms that lead to Milford Haven or Exeter. The bell rings, and anon they are gliding smoothly out of grimy London, away to the clover-scented meadows, to the winding river.

Dewrance is in his glory ; a conscientious per-

formance in the tame-cat line is always pleasing to him. He devotes himself to the duties of the day as seriously as if his future bishopric depended on his exact performance of them—as if a deanery in the immediate present hung on his faithful service. He explains to the ladies what they have to see and how they ought to see it ; gives them a concise historical and archæological lecture about the castle, diversified by anecdotes of Charles II. and George IV., who seem to have fastened themselves on to the immortal fabric as barnacles upon some stately ship. He branches off upon an ecclesiastical line after this, and expounds the splendours of the chapel ; but in the midst of his discourse contrives to point out all interesting or remarkable objects which they happen to pass, till a curve of the line brings them face to face with the towers and battlements of the Norman stronghold standing boldly out against a background of undulating wood, bright with summer's early green.

Herman has done nothing but sit in his corner and look at Editha all the time, and has been infinitely content. Once or twice she has stolen a

little look at him, as much as to say, 'Are you interested?' or, 'I hope he is not boring you.' But their eyes have met each time, and hers have been withdrawn in a gentle confusion, a shy surprise. O Love, seeing thy youth is so sweet, whence comes the bitter in thine after years?

They 'do' the castle conscientiously—St. George's Chapel, the terrace above the slopes, where the finest seringas in England are breathing delicate odours to the noontide sun.

'Remind you of orange-blossoms, don't they?' says Dewrance to Editha, in his matter-of-fact voice. 'Hope I may have the pleasure of officiating when you wear that kind of thing.'

Herman leans over and plucks a sprig, an audacity which is high treason or *lèse-majesté*, no doubt, and gives it to Editha.

'Will you keep it till the day of orange-blossoms?' he asks; and as she takes the little flower their eyes meet, and that one long look is love's silent compact—a promise which it were perjury to break, an engagement which death alone could dissolve.

‘The next thing to think about is a fly with a good horse,’ says Dewrance, who has been showing Mrs. Williams a monster gun, and explaining the process of firing the same. ‘We haven’t too much time if you want to see Eton and the river after lunch. Virginia Water and the Forest will take two hours.’

Thus, with agreeable briskness, startling the lovers from their day-dream, Mr. Dewrance leads them in triumph to the High-street, where he and Herman devote themselves to the study of horseflesh as ardently as if they were going to speculate in the purchase of one of those useful hacks which stand in patient rank in the shadow of the castle wall.

After a sharp scrutiny they select a straight-legged animal attached to a decent and roomy landau, and in this vehicle drive into the Long Walk, where the elms are in their early summer beauty, Dewrance still discoursing cheerfully, encouraged thereto by cousin Juliana, who hangs upon his words, and stimulates conversation with frequent exclamations and ejaculations, Editha and Herman sitting opposite each other, rapt in sweetest silence,

the stolen sprig of seringa fastened on the girl's breast.

They are in the Forest, when their charioteer inquires with friendly solicitude whether they would not like to see the 'rottendendrons.' They will have to get out and walk a bit, he informs them, but it is a sight worth seeing—your flyman having a rooted preference for those sights which oblige his fare to leave the vehicle for an hour or so, whereby the flyman may put a nose-bag on his steed, and repose himself in the sun for a while, placidly idle.

'The Rhododendron Walk!' exclaims Dewrance; 'of course, a thing you ought to see, and in perfection just now. Yes, coachman, you can stop for the rhododendrons.'

They drive to a wooden gate—rustic, unpretending—alight, and enter a paradise of purple and green—a verdant alley between high walls of rhododendrons, which have grown to absolute trees. Birds are singing, bees humming; for the rest there is silence as in a world newly made, solitude as on the shores of the Amazon.

'How lovely!' exclaim the ladies simultaneously.

‘Yes, it’s pretty, isn’t it? You don’t get this kind of thing in Wales. This is royal; the bushes were planted by Queen Charlotte.’

‘What a pity they’re all one colour!’ says Mrs. Williams, who looks at rhododendrons as rhododendrons, and would like to see the last varieties of the nurseryman’s culture in this century-old avenue.

‘O Juliana, how can you find fault with anything so perfectly lovely!’

‘My dear, if there were a few of those white ones, or the rose-coloured which we saw at Kew, interspersed, you know, it would certainly heighten the effect.’

Mrs. Williams is a slow walker, and, in faithful attendance upon her, the Curate soon finds himself left ever so far behind by the other two, who wander on, and are out of sight before cousin Juliana has succeeded in distinguishing a squirrel, which Mr. Dewrance has politely pointed out to her, frisking in the wooded background which breaks upon them here and there through a gap in the rhododendrons.

Those others are out of ear-shot very soon, alone,

as Adam and Eve in Paradise, and as forgetful of the rest of the world as if they had been verily the first of created human beings, and the mass of mankind an affair of the remote future. Herman's silence is over. They are together among the flowers, with the lark singing shrilly sweet aloft in the cloudless blue—alone as they have not been since vaguest fancies grew to strongest love.

‘Editha, you wear that flower for my sake. Does it mean that you will wear the orange-bloom for none but me? Answer yes, darling; for none but me—all unworthy of your love, but chosen because I love so well. Look at me, Editha—answer, sweet. My happiest thought in looking forward to this day was the thought that we might be alone for a little while. Our moments together are so brief.’

She cannot answer him just yet. One little hand plays nervously with the spray of seringa, her eyelids droop over the soft gray eyes. He sees the dark lashes tremble on the rich bloom of her cheek before that lovely blush dies away and leaves her pale.

‘Editha, are you angry with me for having dared to hope? I know I am not worthy of you, that I am your inferior in all that is highest and best in mind or heart. I have known that from the day we met—from that happy summer hour, nearly a year ago, when we sat on the margin of the fountain, and you talked to me of my profession with that sweet serious air of yours which made me think of Hypatia. But I love you, dear; and true love must stand for virtues that I have not. I will
” love and honour you all the days of my life, and my nature shall be exalted by its union with yours. Dearest, you have the prettiest way of lecturing me sometimes; you inspire me with loftier desires, you elevate the mere thirst of success to a noble ambition. Love, will you take my life into your hands, be my teacher, my guide, the gentle ruler of my days and thoughts? That wide word wife includes all the rest. Will you be my wife, Editha?’

He has taken the hand that hung loose at her side—the hand that he longed so to take last year at Lochwithian—taken possession of it utterly, as if it were his own property.

‘If I thought your life would be better or happier,’ she falters, only able to approach the awful question in a lateral direction.

‘It will be—happier, better, brighter, and ever so much longer; for if you were to reject me I should make short work of the wretched remnant of my existence—squander it on riotous nights, burn it out in a blaze of gas; devote my days to billiards, my nights to tobacco, sleeplessness, and green tea. You mean yes, Editha. I shall see the waxen orange-flowers in your dark hair—worn for me—for me, the king of men on that glad day. Darling, you love me a little, you will bear with me a little? You will take me, faulty as I am—trust me with your young life, believe in me and in my future, which shall be bright for your dear sake, if labour and ambition can brighten it. Love, you are all my own—this trembling hand answers best.’

His arm is round her, and she is drawn to his breast in the sweet summer solitude. Her head lies there for one blessed moment, while his lips seal their betrothal—the first masculine lips, save her father’s, that have kissed her since she was a child

—a kiss of sacred promise, never to be forgotten, sealing her for his own.

The contract being thus ratified, her next thought is of her sister.

‘Ruth will be sorry,’ she says regretfully.

‘Sorry that I have won you, my sweet? Can Ruth be so unkind?’

‘Sorry for a marriage that will separate me from her. You must live in London always, must you not?’

‘For a journalist and author who wishes to do the best for himself London is the only field. The Lake poets managed to write at three days’ journey from the metropolis, but they did not make their fortunes. Southey would have been a rich man if he had lived in the Temple and written for the daily press.’

‘We must live in London then, Herman?’ How sweet that plural pronoun to the lover’s ear! ‘And Ruth will be alone at the Priory.’

‘Why should she live alone, if your society is essential to her happiness? Let her home be with us.’

‘Dear Herman, how good of you to propose it!

But I do not think she would leave Lochwithian on any account.'

'Then she loves Lochwithian more than she loves you, and as I love you better than all the world, I must have the better right to you.'

'She may come and stay with us sometimes?' says Editha. It seems quite a natural thing to talk of their future already, though it is but a minute since love has spoken boldly.

'She shall have loving welcome, let her come when she may,' replies Herman, careless of all things in this blissful moment.

They walk side by side between the rhododendrons, her hand drawn through his arm and held there, as if it were never to be released from that strong grasp. A backward glance shows him the Curate and cousin Juliana, still afar, but in sight, warning him that there must be no farther demonstrations of victorious love.

'My darling, do you know that when first we met I was absolutely afraid of you? I can hardly believe, at this blessed moment, with this dear hand in mine, that you are really the young lady I came

to see at Lochwithian—the serious young lady, sworn ally of the Church, a curate in petticoats, whom I approached with admiring awe, and in whom every touch of sweetness and womanliness was an exquisite surprise.’

‘Need a woman be less womanly for giving some thought to serious things, and for trying—ever so feebly at best—to do her duty?’

‘Dearest, you have answered that question by your own example—she need not. The womanliest woman I know is she whose hand I hold. I know that I am not good enough for you, dear, but I no longer fear your goodness. Take my life into your hands, and make it better if you can—happier you cannot fail to make it.’

Hereupon they slacken their pace, and let cousin Juliana overtake them, ‘scant of breath,’ like the Danish prince, and finding balmy June too much for her. So they leave the rhododendron wood and drive on to Virginia Water, and wander—Herman and Editha always side by side—on the verdant margin of that placid lake, and hear the birds singing in the silent woods, and pour out sweet con-

fessions of mutual feeling, telling each other how first, when first, tremulous as a new-fledged bird, the thrilling thought awoke in each breast that this was love. Dewrance, resigned, and bearing himself with the magnanimity of a Damon, sees and understands all, and bears the burden of cousin Juliana, and orders the luncheon, and makes the salad, and charts the boat by and by, and secures a compartment for the return journey, and carves chickens and tongue, and hands teacups, and compounds claret-cup at the evening meal, and is altogether the best of fellows, as Herman tells him when they leave Lima-crescent, and walk beneath summer starshine to Bolivia-gardens.

‘You’re a dear fellow, Dewrance, a genuine thorough-going friend; and I feel as if I owe you in some sort the beginning of my happiness. It’s all right, my dear boy, and I—well, I’m a great deal luckier than I deserve to be.’

‘As if I didn’t know that! I thought you would bring matters to a crisis to-day. Curious, rather, that it should end so, after your very emphatic observations at Llandrysak; but I never knew a

man protest his unfitness for any particular woman without his ending by falling in love with that very woman. No, I am not surprised ; a little sorry, perhaps, knowing both of you pretty well, and seeing what you saw so clearly at the outset, the want of harmony in your lives.'

'Cannot my life become better under her influence ?'

'That's an open question. A man so self-contained as you is hardly a likely subject for a wife's influence. She may take the colour of her thoughts from you, but I doubt if she'll ever succeed in changing the colour of yours. Have you told her your opinions, by the way ?'

'About what ?'

'Upon the subject you have freely discussed with me ; a trifle, and beside the question, perhaps, in your mind, but to her the one thing needful. Have you told her your estimate of Christianity ?'

'I have asked her to be my wife, and she has answered yes,' says Herman. 'I did not accompany the question with a concise confession of faith, or want of faith—did not read myself in with the

thirty-nine articles of my particular creed. I don't know what High-Church people may do under similar circumstances, or what you would expect from me.'

'I think it would have been the act of an honest man to tell her the truth. Faith is her strong rock.'

'I shall never assail its foundations. It is for your spiritual millionaire to make converts. The bankrupt in spiritual things asks no man to share his destitution.'

Three days after the Windsor expedition the Squire returns to Lochwithian with his womankind; and before that return everything is arranged. Direfully disappointed at first that the son-in-law presented to him should be a literary adventurer instead of a landed gentleman—slow to understand the promise of Herman's career, recognising but little advantage in present reputation or future glory—he is angry with cousin Juliana for her carelessness, with himself for his blindness, with Editha for her infatuation, and with Herman for his presumption. Reluctantly, finding Editha firm as rock, he gives way, and submits dolefully to Love's stern decree.

It is hardly a relief to hear that Herman has saved a few thousands, or that he estimates his income roughly at two thousand per annum.

‘Don’t call it income, my dear fellow,’ says the Squire testily. ‘If you had the gout in your hand to-morrow, the income would stop.’

‘Not necessarily. I could dictate to a shorthand writer. One of Scott’s best novels was dictated from a sick-bed.’


‘Pshaw! You may have softening of the brain, or the public humour may change—your novels prove a drug in the market. Call your present earnings what you please, Mr. Westray, so long as you don’t call them income.’

‘So be it,’ replies Herman. ‘I am not afraid of the future with Editha for my wife.’

‘Whoever heard of a man being afraid of the future when he wants to get married!’ exclaims Mr. Morcombe. ‘A lawyer’s clerk will marry on sixty pounds a year without being afraid of the future, though the future may mean six hungry children. People never are afraid of the future when they want to indulge themselves in the present.’

After much bemoaning about Vivian Hetheridge, whose ultimate union with Editha he has looked upon as a settled thing, the Squire gives his melancholy consent. Herman is to insure his life for three thousand pounds, and settle the policy on his wife, and Editha's two hundred a year is to be tied up as tightly as many-worded legal documents can tie it—to which conditions Herman agrees rejoicingly.

Happy interval between the day of betrothal and the sad hour of parting ! Herman and Editha spend the greater part of those three days in unrestrained companionship, cousin Juliana looking on placidly, having taken her scolding meekly from the Squire, and being at heart devoted to the lovers. These three perambulate that Tyburnian suburb, with its endless labyrinth of streets and crescents and gardens and terraces, looking for that archetypal house in which the young couple are to set up their household gods, and enter upon the mystery of domestic life. They talk of it as lightly, both of them, as if it were a summer holiday, rather than the solemn thing it is, committing them to manifold responsibilities,



opening the doors of a world full of perils and pains and sorrows. Single, these two young lives are like a ship lying in harbour, safe from winds and waves ; married, they will resemble the same ship far out at sea, tempest-tost, fighting the elements, with desperate odds against her.

They are not looking for the actual house in which they are to live, but only for the kind of house they will require—so that the choice may be simplified by and by. ‘It is much too soon for thinking about a house,’ says Editha.

‘Not at all too soon,’ protests Herman. ‘What is there to delay our marriage ? If you knew what an unsettled purposeless being I shall be until our new life begins, you would not be so cruel as protract my misery.’

‘I want Ruth to get used to the idea of losing me,’ replies Editha. ‘You can come to Lochwithian when your book is finished, you know.’

‘That will not be before August. What do you say to our being married in September ?’

‘September in next year ?’

‘No, my fair tyrant, September next—the Sep-

tember for whose guns the innocent young partridges are fattening.'

'O Herman, I must have one more Christmas at home. All the poor people look forward to Christmas.'

'Coals and blankets,' interjects Herman sceptically.

'And we have an evening for the school children—blind-man's buff and a magic lantern; and Ruth's sofa is carried down to the hall, and she gives away the clothing we have made in the autumn. I must have one more Christmas at Lochwithian, Herman.'

'You shall, darling. We will go down and spend Christmas there together, if your papa will have us; and you shall distribute the frocks and muffetees, and the children shall give three cheers for my bonny young bride, till the old rafters ring.'

He means to have his way, this happy lover, though he is content to say no more just yet. They roam up and down, looking at houses which bear a remarkable family resemblance to one another, the very cornices sprouting out into the same architectural piccalili, a school of ornament which seems

the result of a profound study of the cauliflower tribe. The mantelpieces look as if they had all been dug out of the same quarry, and chipped into shape by the same masons—mottled marble, like Castile soap, in the dining-rooms; statuary marble, with a little more of the cauliflower decoration, in the drawing-rooms. Papers alike—graining alike—general newness and tendency to shrinking in the woodwork alike.

Herman sighs despondently as they stand in the drawing-room of the sixteenth house, the afternoon sun glaring in upon them through three long plate-glass windows set flat in the wall.

‘There’s a sad want of individuality in your modern dwelling-house,’ he says. ‘Too windy for a house, too fine for a factory or a gaol. I haven’t seen my ideal house yet, Editha. Have you?’

Editha owns that the Bayswater dwellings are uninteresting.

‘My love, you would go mad in a vapid square box of this kind, after Lochwithian Priory. We must look farther afield.’

‘There is plenty of time, Herman.’

‘Yes, between this and September. How would you like to live by the water?’

Editha hasn’t the least idea which water he means.

‘On the banks of the Thames—by that river we were on the other day. There are some nice old places at Putney and Fulham and Chiswick—houses that people have lived and died in—not newly-run-up packing-cases smelling of damp mortar.’

‘Indeed, Herman, I should like to live wherever you would be happiest,’ replies Editha, a wife already in self-abnegation and submission; ‘and I think an old-fashioned cottage by that lovely river would be ever so much nicer than Bayswater, where the streets and terraces are so dreadfully long and straight.’

Cousin Juliana suggests that water is generally damp, and that a river-side residence and rheumatism go together in her mind.

‘Dear Juliana, we are only talking at random. There is plenty of time for Herman to change his mind again and again.’

‘Of course,’ says Herman; ‘but I shall explore

Fulham and Chiswick the day after to-morrow, notwithstanding.'

To-morrow is to see their parting—not a sad one, though it is pain to part for ever so brief a span. Herman promises to come to Lochwithian at the end of July. He will finish his book by that time. He means to work double tides—to dash off a new piece for the Frivolity in the intervals of his more serious labour. He feels infinite responsibilities upon him, but not as a burden—rather as an armour which must make him invincible in the fight.

'You can't imagine how light my work will seem to me, Editha, henceforward,' he says, in those too brief moments which they have to themselves at the station. 'I shall have my goal before me now. Until now I have had only an indefinite spasmodic desire to get on, for my own sake—an ambition so utterly selfish that it seemed a vice rather than a virtue. Henceforward I labour for you. That thought will renew my strength. I shall work as well as I did years ago, when I knew my mother's comfort depended on my pen. I have given hostages to Fortune.' And thus they kiss and part.



